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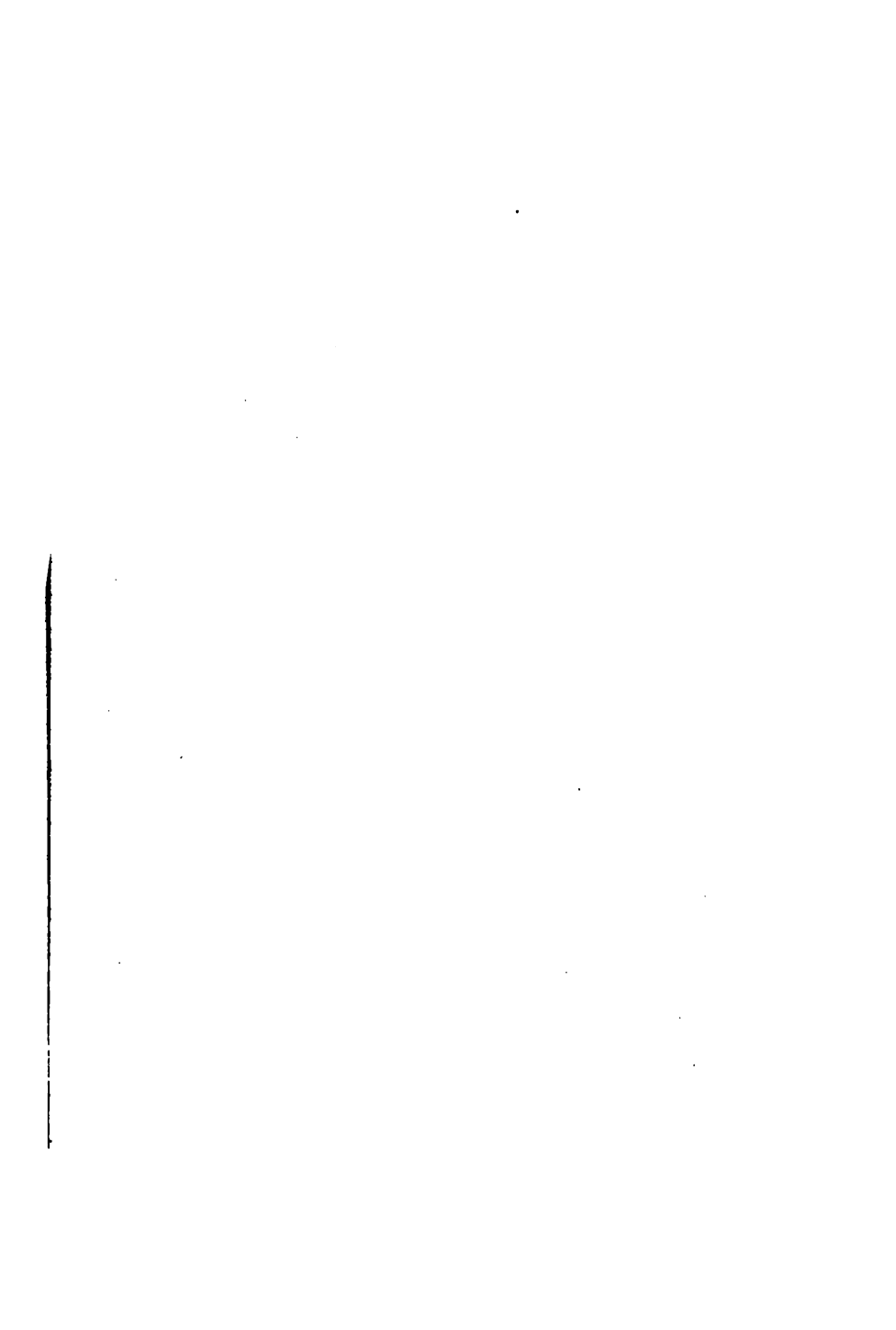


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PEARL DOLES BE





HIS HARVEST

HIS HARVEST

By PEARL DOLES BELL

Author of "Gloria Gray"



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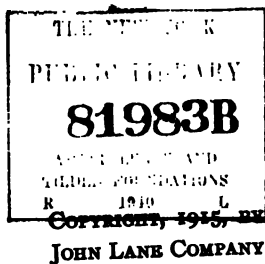
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1915

TO
ONE WHO LOOKS ON
OVER MY SHOULDER WITH
AN UNDERSTANDING SMILE—
MY HUSBAND

HIS HARVEST

HIS HARVEST

CHAPTER I

THE heat was stifling! Soft, white, puffy-looking clouds clung lazily to the canopy of blue overhead. The cornfield at the right of the old farmhouse was yellow and dry, its long leaves rattling like pieces of paper. The grass that struggled for existence around the house looked sickeningly discouraged, and even the house itself had not escaped the mercilessness of the midsummer sun. Its timbers were dry and cracked and the paint had curled up into funny little scales here and there. Just behind it there was a barren spot of earth that had once been a garden, and had it not been for an occasional scorched and sunburned radish top, it would have looked like a huge piece of baked pottery, a great platter, a little nicked and broken at the edges.

The front of the house faced the ocean, and the green of it was the only healthy green nature had left in sight except an old rosebush that grew near the east end of the long low porch.

The green of the sea came from natural causes, but the green of the rosebush and the red of its flowers came from the perforated spout of a little sprinkler that a pair of loving young hands brought from the well at the rear of the house every night at sundown.

A girl stood on the lowest step of the porch and looked out across the sea. There was as nearly a flat calm as she had ever seen, and she had seen the sea in many moods since the day when she had opened a pair of baby eyes and looked out at it for the first time. There was a glassy look to it to-day, with only the gentlest ground

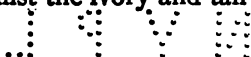
swell which scarcely disturbed its surface. On the horizon a ship had her sails hoisted against the blue sky. Every scrap of her canvas was set, yet she had the speed of a snail. The girl shaded her eyes with one slim, brown hand, but the glare of the sun on the shimmering white sails and glassy water made her head hurt, and she turned away and sought the refuge of a shady corner on the porch where a hammock hung dejectedly from its hooks. A scraggly yellow dog that lay stretched out beneath it opened one eye sleepily, rapped with his ragged tail on the floor several times and went back to sleep. The girl sat down in the hammock and loosened a button at the throat of her dress.

"Tiger, if it's as hot in that place Rev. Bixby tells us about as it is right here, it's no wonder God uses it for a place in which to punish people."

A couple of raps from the scraggly dog's tail. Evidently she expected no other answer, for she went on meditatively:

"I don't think he'll mind it much though, Tige. He always liked hot weather, you remember. It was the winter he hated. It made his rheumatism bad and his temper worse. He kicked you oftener and harder and swore at me louder and longer in the cold weather than he did in the summer. Tige, don't you think maybe God has a cold, er—er—you know what I mean, Tige, to punish the people in who don't mind the heat?"

Two more raps from the dog's tail against the floor near her feet. The girl sighed and pushed back the damp little curls from her brow. She was about fifteen, of medium height and slender. She wore a dress of some blue cotton material that reached half way below her knees. Her legs were bare and brown and small leather sandals covered her feet. Two long black braids hung a foot below her waist and ended in two tight little curls. Her eyes were soft black pools with silky black fringes around them, and her mouth, though not small, was vividly red against the ivory and tan of her skin.



"You know, Tige, Burns says I've got to wear black for decency's sake, but if decency thinks that I ought to wear mourning when I'm *not* mourning at all, why, then decency isn't much of a thinker, Tige. Everybody knows he hated me and that I hated him, and yet they actually seemed disappointed at the funeral because I didn't cry! There's something wrong about the laws of this old world, Tiger dear. Either every one else is right and I'm wrong, or else I'm like the Irish woman's son—I'm the only fellow in the army that's in step. You see, being a dog has its advantages, Tige! Nobody expected *you* to love our stepfather. You could growl at him and even bite him if he kicked you too hard, and nobody expected you to cry when he *quit* kicking suddenly but I—— I am shocking all the county, at least all our end of it, because I am not grieving at the loss of a stepfather whom I never had wanted!" There was a brief pause, during which the girl steadied her trembling lips. When the little convulsive quivering had been determinedly controlled, she leaned forward and patted the dog's head gently.

"Tiger, it's only fair I should tell you about his—will. I—I—just couldn't tell you before. Some way, ever since they read that uncanny thing, with its wicked attempt at humor, I—I've been ashamed! I've felt as if I—as if I were not really human. It was so like him, that will! You remember, Tige, that our stepfather was never amused at things which gave amusement to others. But you recall how he could laugh over hideous, repulsive things. There was the time he watched a black snake charming a little bird. You remember he laughed until he no longer had breath left for kicking you, when you rushed at the long, shining thing that swung rhythmically to and fro from the limb of a tree, always nearer and nearer to the little bird, and closed your sharp teeth upon it, just behind its flat, narrow head. The bird was free, and our stepfather was furious. Then there was the time an automobile on its way to The Highlands bumped

into the sign-post down at the cross-roads, and then refused to go another foot. Do you remember how he sat with his back against the fence on the opposite side of the road and laughed at the stranger who was on *his* back in two inches of dust under the car? And—and then how he laughed the time you were so covered with wood ticks!”

The dog barked suddenly. “I knew you’d remember that, Tige. It was not funny to you, was it, boy?—but it was terribly funny to him. That’s the way it is with his will, Tiger dear—not funny to me, but terribly funny to him! At first I thought I never could talk to you about it, but since it concerns you as much as it does me, it is only fair that you should know its contents.”

The girl’s dark eyes were smarting with angry, unshed tears.

“Tiger, he—he said that he left his ‘just and unjust debts, a—a yellow dog, a gun that wouldn’t shoot, a motor-boat that wouldn’t mote, a stepdaughter who wouldn’t daught, and a horse with spavins’ to that young Mr. Atherton, to whom he had mortgaged this place some time ago. You know when the mortgage fell due last year we—he, Mr. Demeral, wasn’t able to pay it, and it seems that this New York millionaire loaned him another thousand or so, which, by the way, shows ‘a lack of business sense,’ so Burns says, and (still according to Burns) he likely destroyed the worthless note which our stepfather had given him, the moment he was alone. I—I think I heard our stepfather laugh, his high-pitched little cackle, several times while the will was being read, and I—I just hated him like—like the most terrible thing in all the world, whatever that is. He had no right to dispose of us in that manner, and I’ll think up something awful to do to that Mr. Atherton if he insists on making us belong to him. I—oh, Tiger, there they come! He telephoned Burns last night that he and some friends would run down from New York to-day and have luncheon ‘on the estate,’ as though a run from

New York to a place far past The Highlands was nothing at all. Tige, our stepfather had no right to bequeath us to any one just as if we were—er—well, were just *things*! I'll not belong to any one but you, Tiger, and don't you belong to any one but *me*."

"Miss Jean, there's them folks a-comin'. Hain't you a-goin' to change your dress?" called the old servant from behind the screen door.

"No, Burns, I am not going to do anything at all but sit right here."

"Landsakes, and them such swells too. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

The road that stretched away from the front of the house had been a long yellow ribbon a few moments before; now it was only a thick cloud of dust. The horns of a couple of motor-cars were breaking the sweet summer silence, but only one car was visible. The other was buried in the roll of yellow dust.

The dog at the girl's feet reared his head in startled surprise, his one good ear stiffened and straight, the other, a ragged thing that told a pathetic tale of some past bloody battle, making a brave effort to stand erect, but only succeeded in getting half way up and doubling back over one bloodshot eye. The girl watched the approaching automobile and cloud of dust sullenly, her eyes narrowed, her hands clenched together in her lap, her thin red under lip caught between her small white teeth.

The machine stopped in front of the house and the other one swung in behind it. Besides the chauffeur each car contained a man and a woman, gay in spite of the heat. Burns ran out to the gate, tying on a fresh white apron as she went and bobbing her grizzled old head by way of greeting. In a second the long linen coats had been abandoned, and the girl saw the two men in white flannels and the women in white embroidery and lace come leisurely through her old gate.

Tige was growling and straining at his collar, so near to choking himself that his eyes bulged out. But the

girl's slim brown fingers held the strip of leather with the iron grip of a man. She longed to let him go, to sit back and watch the havoc Tige would make of that patch of flannel and lace. But she realized now, as she had done several times of late, that she was almost a woman, and must no longer give rein to her childish desires. The woman in front caught the French heel of her shoe in a branch of the honeysuckle vine that wound itself round the old pillar on one side of the gate, and was dragging it along with her, pulling it loose from its beloved post. The girl on the porch could have screamed with fury, especially when the tall, good-looking man, who walked beside the woman, stooped and untangled the thirsty, half-scorched little tendrils from the foot held so daintily out to him, and threw it impatiently to one side. The girl on the porch let go her hold on the leather collar, but hastily caught it again before the dog was fully aware of his freedom.

"Yessam, she's here. She wasn't feeling well, so she hain't dressed up none, but I reckon you all will overlook that."

The woman in front smiled patronizingly at Burns and turned to those behind her.

"She hain't dressed up none, but we all will overlook that, won't we?" she mimicked.

A shout from the men and a little gurgle of laughter from the other woman answered her.

"Your house needs a coat of paint, Jim. And you surely must have that road fixed," this from the petite pretty blonde woman in the rear.

"The road go hang! What's worrying me is my fear that there isn't a cold bottle on the place," grumbled the man at her elbow.

"All applicants for the position of nurse will be expected to remain on the water wagon until after said position is filled satisfactorily, and winning applicant will be expected to sign the pledge," laughed the taller woman across a pretty shoulder.

They had reached the house and were ascending the steps when Burns, filled with swelling pride to be the mistress of ceremonies on such an occasion, with a majestic flourish of one arm toward the hammock and a curtsy to the ladies and gentlemen, said importantly:

"Miss Jeanne Delaine, called Jean for short," then disappeared hastily inside the house, the sudden and heartbreaking odor of burning vegetables in her kitchen-bred nostrils.

There was a general gasp from the quartet on the steps, and a series of "Ahs" and "Ohs."

"Why, she's not a little child at all! She's almost a grown-up young lady!" they chorused when the ebbing of their surprise gave them breath.

"The will didn't exactly call her a child," reminded one of the men, a big, handsome, clear-eyed young fellow. "It called her a girl, and we very naturally supposed her to be a little child."

As he spoke he strode toward the girl in the hammock with outstretched hands.

"I am Jim Atherton, Miss Jeanne. Perhaps you have heard of me?"

"Oh, yes," sighed the girl wearily. "I've heard of almost nothing else for more than a year. Mr. Demeral hated you almost as much as he hated me, and he used to wish hourly that he could manage some way to get you and me married to each other when I grew old enough. He used to say 'by Gad, he'd have something to worry his idle brain if he had *her*. *She'd* keep him busy. And maybe he'd beat her up once in a while like a few of the swells I've read about beat up their wives with golf clubs and the like. He's got so damn much money he treats me as if I were a beggar, but I'll get even with him some day."

The girl paused and glanced indifferently at the astonished faces around her. Leaning forward she boxed the growling dog's nose, and then looking back at the

handsome man who stood, hat in hand before her, his face flushed and his eyes wide with wonder, she went on.

"Oh, yes, I've heard of you, sir. He hated you because you were rich and he was poor. He'd squandered the little fortune my mother left and he wanted to make you suffer some way. I guess that was why he gave me to you."

There was a wry little smile curling the corners of the girl's lips. It made two of the party burst into peals of laughter and gave to the other two a desire to kiss the saucy mouth that was far too young for satire or cynicism.

"Look at her teeth! They're perfect," whispered the little blonde lady.

"So are her eyes and her hair," added the man at her side in what he believed was a whisper, too.

"Why itemize? She is all perfect, isn't she, Winifred?" and the blonde lady smiled almost maliciously at Jim Atherton's fiancée.

"Almost," assented that young lady. "Her mouth is a little large and her nose is a little retroussé, but she may outgrow those faults. The most imperfect thing about her, it seems to me, is her bad breeding, and I'm afraid that that is a thing she will not outgrow."

The keen ears of the girl in front of them caught the whispers, and she began to count slowly, and when she had reached ten she said by way of explanation:

"My mother taught me to count ten when very angry. Sometimes when I want to hurt people I do that, but it doesn't always work as it should. Occasionally it leaves me with only the passionate desire that the old gun we have would shoot." After a pause she continued: "It left me that way just now."

The pretty lady called Winifred shuddered, and Jim Atherton laid his hand on her arm as if called upon to protect her.

"I say, we're a nice lot. Ladies and gentlemen never

taunt people into saying things with which they can find fault, and I offer my apologies."

"But, Billy Norton, how could we know that she could hear what we said?" the petite blonde lady defended.

"We said things, didn't we, little wife-o'-mine, that proved that *we* were ill-bred and couldn't outgrow it. Besides, it is never very nice to discuss in whispers one who is present."

"Let him make our apologies, Eve, and you and I will make Jim find us a cool corner (if there is such a thing on the place) where we can rest for a half hour."

Jim Atherton was still looking with fascinated interest at the girl in the hammock, but at his fiancée's words he bowed with mechanical deference.

"Miss Blake and Mrs. Norton wish me to escort them to some cool retreat. With your permission I shall take them inside the house."

"It is *your* house, and I hope you will feel quite at liberty to do as you please." The girl in the hammock did not smile, and whether the quick little gesture she made with one slim hand meant hospitality or renunciation Jim Atherton did not know, but he went away with a curious, indefinable ache in his heart.

As the screen door slammed shut behind Jim Atherton and the two ladies, Jean Delaine looked up at Billy Norton, who leaned his long, well-knit figure against the porch pillar, and who was looking ridiculously contrite and ashamed, with a warm, quick smile.

"I like you," she said, and she put out her hand impulsively, and laid her brown little fingers on his inert arm. "I like you, and I wish I'd been bequeathed to you."

Billy Norton never forgot that moment. It opened up that part of his heart that had never had a tenant, the part that is made for brother love.

CHAPTER II

LUNCHEON was over and Winifred Blake and Mr. and Mrs. Billy Norton had strolled down the beach to where a clump of pine trees made a shade at the edge of the sand, kindly leaving Jim Atherton alone with "Miss Jeanne Delaine, called Jean for short."

"They're really not so bad as you think, Miss Jeanne. It's only their way of having an enjoyable time," the man was saying.

The girl, who was back in her place in the hammock, swung her feet thoughtfully, and after a long silence during which she had looked steadily out to sea, she turned back to Jim Atherton with:

"My mother used to say when I was a tiny little girl that maybe I got a lot of pleasure from pulling the cat's tail, but 'how about the cat'? I was just wondering if your friends ever thought about the cat."

Jim glanced at the girl curiously. Was she fifteen or fifty? Her face was the face of a child, but her words were the words of an old woman who had lived long and hard. At luncheon his friends had drawn upon themselves from this girl quick thrusts, which they were unable to parry, and she had met each shaft aimed at herself with another that had deflected it and sent it flying back like a boomerang.

She would be an everlasting joy to him—of that he felt sure. He would send her away to a fashionable boarding school, he told her, and she should become as one of the young ladies down there on the beach. But the girl shook her dark head and said, half apologetically:

"God forbid!"

"And Tiger," he continued, "will have his initials in gold on his collar."

"Oh, *do* you like Tiger?" she cried eagerly. "He's like your friends—he's not really bad. I'm awfully sorry he tried to bite the lady you call 'Miss Winifred,' but you know she really *did* aggravate him when she pushed him out of her way with her parasol. He likes you. He's been sitting close to your feet and looking right up into your face ever since you sat down here by me."

Jim stooped, patted the dog's head and observed smilingly:

"I was under the impression that Tige didn't care particularly for any of us."

"Well, you see, Mr. Atherton, you were all discussing his probable breed. You remember one of you thought he might be a mixture of St. Bernard and English setter. One of you decided he was Irish setter and Scotch deerhound, and one of you thought he might be a few other things. Tige overheard the conversation, Mr. Atherton, and Tige is *terribly* sensitive about his ancestry."

A little later when the linen coats had been donned and the gentlemen and ladies had gathered around the gate, the dog had made friends with them and went from one to another with his good-byes.

The girl looked broodingly into the faces as they turned toward her and hated them even more than she had hated the man her widowed mother had married. Especially did she hate the woman they called Miss Winifred. She hated her soft pink and white face and jeweled hands, her covert smiles, which did not elude her, and her little French phrases, which she did not understand. She hated her with an unreasonable hatred that she did not even try to analyze.

Thrust into the belt of Miss Winifred Blake was a bunch of sweet red roses. She had had one of the chauffeurs gather them for her, and Jeanne Delaine had watched the bouquet grow, had listened to the snap of

the stems under the edge of the chauffeur's knife, and had cringed as from mortal pain, yet she had dared not speak. The rosebush no longer was hers to protect, although it could still be hers to love. Now as she looked back across her shoulder to the poor, devastated rosebush that had always been hers—her one poor green bush that had responded so valiantly to her loving care, standing desolate and bare, robbed of all its fragrance and beauty, her heart ached with a desire to do damage to each smiling face, to fly at them with all her pent-up anger free, and when the dog came and stood near her she bent down and whispered into his ear:

"Tige, you traitor, if you don't stop wagging your tail this minute, I'll chop it off the instant they're out of sight!"

Then with a last good-bye and a promise from Jim Atherton to come for her on the morrow (giving her time to take leave of the old place that had always been her home), they were gone, and only the cloud of dust that had told of their coming remained to tell of their going.

The girl stood quite still at the gate, her dark eyes full of mutiny and defiance, until the dust had settled back to earth and the road was once again the long yellow ribbon. Then she turned slowly toward the house. For a moment she stopped beside the plundered rosebush and two big tears came out of the velvety eyes, trickled down the olive cheeks and fell upon the green leaves and rusty brown thorns. The bush was like her life, she thought—devastated!

First there had been her *débonnaire* young father. She had adored him and they had been such wonderful pals. He had died with a fever. Then there had been the baby sister who had come the next month after her father's death. She had idolized her also, but she died in less than a year. And then,—just two years ago her mother had gone, too, and only God and she herself knew how madly she had loved that mother and how bitterly

she had missed her,—still missed her, would always miss her. Now it was the home!

She looked out over the sea, then sadly around at the road, the fields and the dear old house. Great sobs shook her slender young frame, and Tige came, pushed his head under her unresponsive hand and whined piteously. She reached out and touched the hot boards of the house tenderly, wistfully, and when a scale of the dried paint fell into her palm she leaned forward and kissed the ugly spot where it had been.

After a time her sobs became fewer and softer and finally died away altogether. She and Tiger sat on the porch, looking silently out to sea, until the setting sun threw its last shaft of red across the water,—then with a shiver, as though cold, the girl sprang lightly to her feet.

“I don’t want to go to boarding school, do you, Tige?”

Tige whined and elevated his good ear the fraction of an inch.

“Very well then, Tige, we shan’t go. We’ll run away.”

CHAPTER III

THE man at the desk dismissed his caller with a curt nod and turned impatiently to the boy in blue cloth and brass buttons.

"Any one else, Skinny?"

The boy grinned, displaying a mouth almost destitute of teeth.

"There's a girl, a worn traveling bag and a dog, sir."

The man smiled behind his hand. The answers of his office boy were a constant source of amusement to this great theatrical magnate who found so little to laugh at in even his most successful comedies.

"Which would you advise me to see first, Skinny?"

The boy scratched his head thoughtfully for a second, and then his face brightened.

"I'd see them all three at once. They hain't a one of them as looks like a actor."

"Very well; show them in."

The man turned back to the chaos of papers on his desk, and the girl, the traveling bag and the dog were forgotten until a low growl coming from the vicinity of the door aroused him. He swung round in his swivel chair and saw a slender, dark-eyed girl standing just inside his door. One hand grasped the leather collar of an ugly yellow dog whose bloodshot eyes were fixed on a spot somewhere near the calf of one of his legs, and in the other she carried a shabby leather bag.

"If you'd speak to him, sir, he'd be all right. His name is Tiger. He hates strangers."

"Is that so? Well, I'll proceed to get acquainted at once," and the man looked to see if his inkwell were well within reach.

"What's the trouble, Tiger? Don't you know me, old sport?"

Immediately the yellow stub of a tail began to wag, and when the man had assured himself that the wagging was sincere he turned abruptly to the girl.

"I'm very busy; I hope you will be brief."

The girl looked back at him with sweet, unafraid eyes.

"I want to go on the stage."

There was something so simple and direct in the statement that some long slumbering cord in the man's heart was touched. But the habit of sarcasm was strong upon him, and before he knew it the words, "That's hardly an original desire; anything else you wanted to see me about?" had burst from his hasty lips, and the girl stood as one stunned before him.

"No, there is nothing else," she finally answered in a dull, toneless voice.

At least here were no arguments or beseechings, and the man breathed a sigh of relief. He *did* wish people would understand him to mean always exactly what he said, but they never did. Obviously this girl was as direct as himself and therefore understood direct speech in others.

Again he sighed as the girl and her bag and dog disappeared through his door, and he told himself that the sigh came from annoyance because so many valuable minutes must always be wasted on dreamers and stage aspirants.

But he sat for many of those same valuable minutes staring at the spot near the door where the slim little figure had stood when he had dealt it that knock-out blow, and several hours later, as he whirled through Central Park in his big black limousine, a dull little voice kept saying in his ears, "No, there is nothing else."

It was a glorious day. The intense heat of the day before was adulterated with the gentlest southeast breeze that carried with it a tang of salt and made one dream of the sea. Children and their nurses, or mothers, sat about in shady places, and the women's hands lay idle and inert in their laps. Their bits of sewing or open

books were forgotten, and they smiled lazily, indulgently, at the children or gossiped with each other about the passing show.

The man bowed and touched his hat mechanically to those who bowed to him, but it was not until his car had rounded a curve and a certain bench came into view that he was at all alert.

"James, turn in here at the side of the drive and stop."

The chauffeur, well accustomed to his employer's erratic habits, did his bidding without so much as a mental comment. The man stepped from the car, grunting some unintelligible thing to the chauffeur, and made his way toward the bench which had so suddenly awakened him.

The occupant of the bench was speaking when he came up from behind. He paused with no conscious intent of eavesdropping, and listened.

"Wasn't he a beast, Tiger? He didn't even ask what we could do. He looked like that old steer we used to have; do you remember, Tige? He had the same kind of hard, cruel eyes and the same thick neck. You remember, Tige, a man shot our steer because he bellowed at him. Maybe Mr. Hamilton will bellow at somebody some day who won't endure being bellowed at. Anyway, Tiger, we've got to find some place to sleep. I've only a dollar and ten cents left, and we'll have to eat; don't forget that. I *do wish* you had listened to me this morning when we'd finished eating, in the Pennsylvania depot, the lunch I'd brought from home. You went and buried that perfectly good bone in a waste basket. I told you then that you'd want that bone before night, but you wouldn't listen. Tiger, sometimes I'm sorely afraid that you've been inoculated with a few of our stepfather's worst traits."

The little figure on the bench leaned forward and shook an accusing finger in the face of a shaggy yellow dog. The dog whined, whether in regret for the lost bone or for the traits with which he was accused of be-

ing inoculated, no one could know but the girl's arms slipped round his neck, and a shaky little voice cried against his unkempt hair.

"We can't go back, Tige. They know by now that we've run away, and besides I—I'd ra-rather peddle p-p-peanuts th-than g-go to b-boarding sc-school."

The man behind the bench swallowed a couple of times. Then sitting down beside her, he took the girl's arms quietly from around the dog's neck and retained her slim brown hands in his while he looked down into her startled, tear-dimmed eyes.

"You have given me an unpleasant day, and I'm glad I found you. You must not cry. You'll spoil those sweet eyes, and unless I'm terribly mistaken they have a mighty big career ahead of them."

His voice was very gentle, and even Tiger forgot the bellow and wagged his tail and sniffed at his feet approvingly.

"How did you find me and—why did you *wish* to find me?" the girl asked, innocent of any suspicion that what he had said might not be true.

"I—er—traced you, and I wanted to find you because —er"—the man paused the barest perceptible space of time and then went on eagerly, and if the eagerness was a little overdone the girl was too unsophisticated to notice—"because I've something I know you could do, Miss——"

"Jeanne Delaine, sir."

The light in the dark eyes raised to his brought the same inconsistent lump back to his throat that her sobs had sent there, and he tried to swallow it with a muttered oath of disgust.

"Did you speak, sir?"

"Yes, but it does not matter what I said. The most important thing just now is whether or not you care for the place I have to offer you."

"I'd care for anything right now, Mr. Hamilton, so long as it was not downright stealing."

Mr. Hamilton smiled.

"Well, as there will be a great many things to be discussed, you would better go with me to my house (which is also the house of my sister), where we can have tea and be undisturbed. I take it that you are from another town and have not yet found suitable lodgings." He glanced meaningly at the leather bag on the ground beside her.

"No, I haven't found a place yet. Perhaps, though, your sister would not like you to bring Tige and me into her home. We—we're not dressed up much."

At mention of the dog's name the man and the dog turned simultaneously and looked at each other, one with defiance and a little pleading in his bleary, bloodshot eyes, the other with a series of mixed emotions chasing themselves across his face.

He had not counted on the dog. He was not the kind of a dog that one could thrust upon his friends with impunity. He would not receive a flattering welcome in any home of which Mr. Allen Hamilton had the slightest knowledge, and coupled with that he knew that his sister hated dogs, even the petted, well-groomed thoroughbreds belonging to her friends. Mr. Hamilton muttered another oath, which muttering always seemed to dispose of his troubles without further delay, and addressed the girl with all the gallantry (and possibly a little more) that he would have employed had he been addressing one of his sister's most fashionable friends.

"Where you and Tiger are not welcome I don't care to go. So come. We will try my house first, Miss Delaine."

The girl's face flushed with self-consciousness and pleasure. The "Miss Delaine" had made her feel very much a grown-up young lady, and when Mr. Hamilton had lifted herself, her bag and her dog into the big black limousine and had himself climbed up beside the chauffeur, leaving her alone with her belongings, she had hugged Tiger's head tight against her breast and had whispered ecstatically:

"He thinks I'm a grown-up lady, Tige, and I'm going to be an actress. And I can't ever, ever romp and play with you again, and you must never tempt me, Tige. Oh, Tige, he isn't a beast at all, is he? It's a funny world where nobody is anything at all like you think he is. But I'm happy, Tiger dear, and, like somebody else whom we heard those people talking about yesterday, 'I don't care.'"

CHAPTER IV

O H, Tiger, did you ever dream there was a place outside of fairy books as nice as this? Look at those pictures! Aren't they grand? And these rugs! It's 'most like walking on cushions. It's awfully nice, and it makes me feel kind of solemn-like, but we've got to act just as if we were used to it, and don't get nervous, Tige dear. Ugh, Tige! Look at that gold chair over there! I wonder if anybody ever sits on it. My! maybe we'll be rich like this some day." After a long silence, "I wonder why he's gone so long. He said he'd bring his sister right down." Pause. "Maybe she's fainted." Pause. "Maybe she won't—let—us stay." There was a little catch in the last words and a pair of wistful dark eyes glanced regretfully around the exquisitely furnished room, and Tiger, feeling that it was expected of him, whined mournfully.

Meantime an altogether different scene was being enacted upstairs in the pink and white boudoir of Mr. Allen Hamilton's sister, "the charming Eleanor Hamilton Rollins, widow of the late Samuel Rollins, broker." The pretty lady lay crushed into a little heap on a chaise-lounge piled high with silken pillows. Angry sobs shook her delicate shoulders, but the man who stood near looking down at her knew there were no tears, and he waited patiently for the fit of anger to pass.

"She is such a fearless little thing," he was saying, "and her eyes have a way of looking into your soul and searching out your virtues, if you are fortunate enough to have any. I haven't asked her a thing about herself. I suspect she's like a certain other young lady I know, subject to fits of temper, and in one of these fits she just took her dog and grip and ran away. If that is all there

is to it we will have her back with her family the first thing to-morrow morning. But what she needs right now is a place to sleep and something to eat, and I could think of no place where it would be more proper for me to take the little waif than to my sister's home."

He stopped speaking abruptly. The woman turned her head a little, and a muffled, petulant voice came from the depths of a silken pillow.

"But the—the dog! Couldn't you think of a more proper place of shelter for a dog than your sister's home?"

The woman's face was still buried in the pillows, so the man smiled openly.

"But he is a real decent sort of a dog. Not a prize winner, I'll admit. But then you and I never cared particularly for the prize-winning species, and this dog could take down all the blue ribbons in the world if they were ever put up for faithfulness."

Sob—sob from the pillows.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Eleanor, that many of you good women are willing to dispense your charities only when you don't have to come into direct contact with the poor, sordid thing you are helping? You hang them onto the end of a long pole, as it were, and the longer the pole the better with most of you. You give with lavish hands, but you deputize some one else to distribute your gold for you. There are piles of need for your charities right at your doors, but you might have to hand it out yourself there, and it takes a long pole to reach to China or even to our own ghetto and Hell's Acres here at home. You are good because you are selfish, and you are afraid to be bad,—afraid of the eternal damnation you learned about when you were children. So you give that which is easiest to give, money, and withhold all the sweeter things and many times the more necessary things that you might give. I once saw a man sitting alone in the Battery, and he looked so forlorn and so utterly desperate that I slipped a bank note

into his nerveless hand as I passed him by. He sprang to his feet with a savage cry like that of a wounded animal and tossed the bank note into the bay. I thought he was mad, so I went back and sat down by him and put a restraining arm about his shoulders. Instantly he burst into violent weeping, and above his sobs came the broken words, 'Why didn't you do that before? Why didn't you do that before?'

"Little by little I got the story from him. His wife and baby were ill with the smallpox and had been taken away to a pest house where he could not gain admittance, and if they died they must die away from him. He could not even hold them tight against his aching breast. Perhaps he would never see his Mary and the little one again, and he loved them so, he loved them so. No, he hadn't any money and he could not remember when he had last eaten. He didn't want money and he didn't want anything to eat. He was alone, and Mary and the little one were over there on that island, and he was so sick and so lonely. Six men had dropped coins into his lap as they had passed him by. Did his sorrow make him look like a beggar? He wasn't a beggar. Didn't these people think that poor devils like himself ever had any troubles except money troubles? If a dog dragged a mangled foot and whined with pain, no one offered him a bone, but every one stopped and patted his head, and companionship lessened his pain.

"But when a man drags a weary heart-breaking body to a bench the passersby throw him a coin—and—leave him alone with his mangled heart."

Allen Hamilton paused and drew a long breath, and the silence that followed it was sepulchral. Suddenly the figure on the lounge shuddered and lifted its pretty head.

"Has—has Jenkins fixed her something to eat? You'd better tell Thompson to prepare the east guest chamber for her at once, and—and—Allen"—as the man started for the door his face turned considerably from her—

"you might tell Jenkins to—to arrange the sleeping porch off the east guest chamber for the—the dog."

The man went out softly. The woman scurried to her feet, and with only the hastiest look into the mirror at her flushed face ran swiftly down the polished stairs.

When Allen Hamilton entered the long, low-ceilinged drawing-room ten minutes later he found "the charming Eleanor Hamilton Rollins, widow of the late Samuel Rollins, broker," and the dark-eyed little girl smiling into each other's eyes and talking like magpies. His sister, only barely past the high noon of her twenties, was delicately beautiful as a piece of Dresden china, with her pink and white coloring, her piles of pale gold hair and her wide sapphire blue eyes. The girl who smiled back at her had the olive skin and red lips of the warmer climes. A few soft tendrils of the silky hair lay damp and black against the ivory of her forehead. The long curling lashes lay dark and shadowy against the tanned cheeks and blue-veined eyelids, and two even rows of small white teeth showed like bits of porcelain against the vivid red of her lips. One of her slim brown hands, which spoke so plainly of wind and sun and an open sea, a hand that somehow looked so capable in spite of its youth and slimness, lay quivering excitedly in one of the jeweled white hands of his sister. One of his sister's silk shod feet stuck out from the folds of her gown and—Allen Hamilton started and rubbed his hand across his eyes,—the shaggy, scarred nose of the yellow dog lay stretched across the toe of her pink satin slipper.

Was his sister, after all, more generous than he had ever thought her? Or had he a great actress in his own home whose ability he had never discovered? He could not tell. He knew her natural shrinking from all things plebeian. Their own great grandfather had been of the common people but she had always chosen to ignore or forget that fact, holding a finger up warningly on the few occasions when he had seen fit to

remind her of it. He had to confess to himself now that there was nothing plebeian in Eleanor Hamilton Rollins from the topmost golden hair of her head to the tip of that pink satin slipper where Tiger's nose was resting so contentedly. He was puzzled, but happily so, for whatever new element he had found thus suddenly in her character, whether generosity or the ability to act (not the petty acting that all society women and nearly every one else are called upon to do, but the kind of acting of which Shakespeare dreamed, the kind that allows the head of a cur dog to rest undisturbed on the toe of a woman who hates all dogs) he was glad, only he could not help hoping that it was Generosity.

"I've ordered tea to be served here, ladies."

He smiled at the surprise in the two faces as they looked up at him and their wandering thoughts came back to earth.

"I declare, you both look guilty! I hope you've not robbed the jam jar or concocted a plot for robbing the United States Treasury."

"No, nothing so simple as the theft of jam or so gigantic as that of the Treasury of the United States. But, oh, Allen, we *have* been concocting a wonderful scheme and we shall not tell you about it until after we've had tea."

There was a lilt of enthusiasm in Eleanor's voice that made her brother wonder a little more. All during tea when the three of them chatted gaily about everything under the sun but the strangers beneath the roof, his eyes were constantly searching his sister's face with a fond new interest in their grey depths.

After tea the girl was shown to the chamber which had been arranged for her. She and her dog were left alone to reconnoiter through the beautiful furnishings of the room and the scant, summery ones of the sleeping porch while the brother and sister discussed the girl's pathetic past, as she had told it to Eleanor

Rollins and made plans for her immediate future in the latter's airy sitting-room.

"I heard something about Jim's legacy at the club but I didn't pay very much attention to it at the time," Allen Hamilton exclaimed, when Eleanor had finished the story. "What an old beast her stepfather must have been!"

"Yes. And yet I think that the kindest thing he ever did," went on Eleanor, "was to bequeath that child to some decent fellow like Jim Atherton. It might have meant all sorts of good things for her if she had been a little less stubborn or a little less independent if you would prefer to call it that. But she told me that she could have torn into small pieces the gay, irresponsible crowd that came to her home, coolly looked her over, made jests over her head and finished by stripping her one lone rose bush of every loved bloom. She declares that she will not recognize any part of that silly will which disposed of her with such nonchalance."

"Poor little kid! It is that kind of spirit that has accomplished the big things in the world and I like it."

The man looked out the window a moment and then continued.

"You never had a kiddie and it might be a long time before you do. Likely, I will never have one. Besides, you are pretty young, young enough to need something to look after that will give you other things than yourself to think about and keep you out of mischief. You have never had a sister. We might keep her as one."

"I had thought of that."

He wheeled around and looked at the young woman lying back in a low wicker chair and some of his astonishment showed in his face. She smiled back at him a little seriously and a flush spread slowly over her delicately curved cheeks.

"Eleanor, are you acting a part to please me and perhaps indulging a whim of your own or are you displaying a generosity that has heretofore been latent?"

"I am not acting, Allen."

"Then this new virtue added to all the others you possess makes of you the sweetest woman in all the world," and he caught her up in his great powerful arms and pressed his lips to the fragrant golden hair.

That night Allen Hamilton and his sister sat long in the low-ceilinged drawing-room. All engagements had been canceled for the evening. At home to no one they laid careful, much discussed plans for the little girl in the east guest chamber who lay between soft silken sheets, too excited to sleep.

Outside the long French windows of that chamber on a tiny screened-in balcony lay a much satisfied dog, a couple of well cooked mutton chops in his stomach and a pillow of down under the corrugation of his too well defined ribs.

Occasionally when the girl would slide from the bed and creep to the wide open windows, touching the things she passed on the way to see if they were real, the dog would lift his one obedient ear and give vent to a soft, joyful little bark which said as plainly as could be, "It was a fine old home but it couldn't touch this, and Burns never *could* cook a chop like that Frenchie in the kitchen of this house. Besides, if she could, she'd never give it to me."

Once when he had barked a little too joyously the girl, understanding, sank to the floor beside him and laying one warm cheek on his shaggy neck began to chide him for his unfaithfulness to the old home, trying all the while to feel a homesickness in her own heart that she knew was not there. Only once when she had visualized the place,—the old house with its dried and scaling paint, the little patch of burned whispering corn stalks, the thirsty old rose bush that could drink such a lot of water without seeming ever to be satisfied, the sea that stretched from the house away to the horizon, sometimes dark and threatening, pulling and tearing at her feet as she ran along the beach, or calm

and blue, murmuring all its hidden secrets to her as she lay on her back on its border of sand—and had compelled herself with a driving sense of duty to look at the picture her imagination drew up before her, the homesickness—for the lack of which a moment before she had scorned herself—crept into her heart and crowded out everything else. True, the home was no longer hers but it had been “home” since old Doctor Jones had ushered her into it so unceremoniously and she longed to get out of this house, where everything was so unlike that dear old place by the sea, and run back to it if only to be near it again for one brief hour. It was many long miles over dusty roads but as she lay there in the dark looking across those miles at the things she had loved, she felt that she could run all that long dusty way and be well repaid if she could have just one more look at those things with her material eyes, and touch them again with her yearning fingers. She remembered the many nights she had crept from her bed and gone down to the beach when a storm was raging. Fearless and indifferent to the wind that whipped her gown into shreds she would cling to a mad, tossing scrub pine tree until the bark of it was pressed far into the tender flesh of her arm and listen to the wild roar that grew constantly wilder and watch eagerly for the glimpses of high waves and whirling foam which the flashes of lightning gave her. How many times good old Burns had found her there on the beach in the middle of the night, her flesh cold, her hair and gown wet! Always she had paid for her little pleasure by obediently swallowing all the nauseating hot teas Burns prepared for the cold she was “sure to have” and which she never had. It was nice to be here with people who didn’t treat her as if she were a pauper and who had told her she was exactly the person they had been looking for to fill a certain position which was to be thoroughly explained to her on the morrow but—the place off there *was so* dear to her and—maybe Burns never

would think to water the rose bush. And—that little nest under the window—she wondered if the tiny eggs had hatched yet. Burns would forget to put the crumbs on the window-sill, too, and the little mother bird would think that she, Jeanne, was neglecting her.—She wondered what the man, James Atherton, had said when he had come that day and found her gone and only a much worried Burns to receive him.—He had rather nice eyes, that James Atherton, and Tige had liked him. He was—No, he was not—a bit—like any—of the rest unless it was—that—nice smiling young gentleman. No, there was nothing else. She wanted—to—go on the stage—and he isn't really—like—our steer—he's good—he's more—like the sea—just big—and—and—she had such pretty golden hair—and lips—like the—roses on the—bush—no—there—weren't—any roses a—man shot them—for—bellow—ing—at him—that's a—good—bone—he—

When Eleanor Rollins came softly into the east guest chamber the next morning at nine (an hour before her usual rising time) she pulled the Japanese blinds down to shut out the sun, spread one of the abandoned sheets over the pair on the little balcony and with a new glow of tenderness on her face hastened to her brother's room.

"If you want to see the prettiest picture that your critical eyes have ever looked upon come with me."

Together on tiptoes they entered the east guest chamber. Then both paused and the man unconsciously held his breath.

Outside the long open windows a scraggly yellow dog lay stretched out on a pale blue satin covered pillow, his legs sticking stiffly out from his gaunt body (gaunt in spite of the irregular tufts of hair which did their best to cover it) and the head of a young girl resting against his bony neck and shoulder. The girl's slender arms were crossed just below the V of bare breast which showed where the topmost button of her high-necked gown had come unfastened. One long shining black

braid lay over one shoulder and fell down over her crossed arms to the floor, the other lay out behind her. The silken sheet covered the rest of her body but it only accentuated the immature curves that were almost angles. The face was a little pale, the day before had been a long and a hard one, and little circles were under the white lids of the closed eyes. The thin red lips were parted as if sleep had overtaken them in the middle of a word and the small white teeth showed through.

For a long, silent minute they stood there side by side, brother and sister, widow and bachelor, looking down on the sleepers. Then turning silently, as if by mutual consent, they went from the room, something new and strange in their hearts.

When the day was older, and the girl and dog sat with Eleanor in her dainty boudoir while her maid dressed her hair, Eleanor told the girl of the "place" which she and her brother had manufactured for her the night before, and she made the girl understand how badly they needed her.

"You see, I've been planning a year abroad for a very long time but I couldn't go alone with just a maid, and Allen can go for only the very briefest of flying trips. I really need a companion. So now that I've found the very person I need you don't think I'll let her get away from me, do you? Besides, you don't need any more of schools. Your education is better than mine, thanks to your wonderful mother's teaching and your equally wonderful memory. I went to all sorts of boarding schools but I couldn't learn much and I couldn't retain the little I did manage to learn. I expected the beauty which I knew I possessed to make up for all that I lacked in cleverness and (don't ever tell any one) it always has done it so far. Paris will be a wonderful finishing school for you, and my brother is so sure that you can sing the principal rôle in the great opera which he hopes to produce some day that he wants you to study under M. Dupont, one of the best and

most exclusive instructors of vocal music in the world. He has trained many of the voices of our most famous song birds and there is something in yours which makes my brother willing to gamble on your future."

"But it will cost a great deal of money, will it not?" objected the girl with wide wondering eyes.

"Oh, not so much. And even if it does he is really only lending it to you or advancing it, as he calls it, against the tremendous salary he will have to pay you when you some day sing his great opera. If it and you are the success he declares you *will* be, think of the piles of money you will be putting into his pocket. I'm terribly excited about that year abroad. My visits to the other side have been few and hurried. I've stacks of friends over there, Jeanne. I'd better run now and telephone Allen that it's all arranged," and slipping from under the maid's busy fingers Eleanor ran out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

At a gilded excuse for a desk in another room she sat with a telephone receiver pressed against one shell pink ear, listening for her brother's deep voice. When at last it traveled over the wires to her she began to chatter like a magpie.

"It's all settled, dear. She's a regular darling. Never suspected that it was all a plot to take care of her and still let her feel independent. Anyway, it isn't *all* a 'put up job,' as you called it. My part isn't. I really do want that year abroad. I've thought of it for a long time and you know you told me yourself that I couldn't have it without some sort of companion. Of course your part of the plot is a 'put up job!' You said she *had a voice*—as everybody has who doesn't happen to be a mute—no worse and certainly no better and that if you could work the 'great opera' on her, if you could make her believe that her voice was the one thing necessary to make it a success that that would leave you free to attend to her material needs beyond the necessities which were about all that paid companions ever

earned. You are an awful fraud, and you know it, you old dear. And this plot is going to cost you pretty heavily but you deserve that it should. She's so anxious to be of some service to you that she'll never miss one of those almost prohibitively priced lessons, and she'll study every minute that she isn't companioning to me."

It was like Eleanor to run breathlessly along, manufacturing words, or adding extra syllables to old words, when Webster failed to hand out the right one at the right time and it was like her brother to wait patiently at the other end of the line for the second when she would pause for breath.

"What did she say when you mentioned our adopting her?"

"Oh, she didn't take to the idea. But she said she wanted to do the thing that would give her the greatest chance for repaying us, etc. She's thoroughly satisfied, bless her innocent, unsuspecting little heart, that we are desperately in need of her services, and, Allen, she's so 'glad she's found us.' I do hope we get her away before Jim Atherton finds out her whereabouts, not that I think Winifred would let him take her, I'm sure she wouldn't. All right. Good-bye. Oh, say, Allen, she's a wonderfully learned little thing,—makes me feel like an ignoramus. It seems that her mother was a very great lady before her marriage with a *débonnaire* young adventurer outside the charmed circle and that this lady mother taught her instead of sending her to school. Yes. Well, good-bye, philanthropist. Oh, Allen,—don't forget to look up the legal points about Jim's claim on her. All right, dear. Good-bye."

"I don't know what provision Allen's plot makes for Tiger, but I'm sure he never mentioned in his talk with me whether he expected Tiger to work at the companion job or the vocal business!" Eleanor soliloquized as she walked back to her boudoir. "Men are so stupid sometimes. I wonder if dog catchers ever wander into this particular neighborhood!"

CHAPTER V

PARIS, March 3, 19—.

MR. ALLEN HAMILTON,
Cosmopolitan Opera House Block,
New York City.

DEAR BIG CHIEF:

"It is a dreary, drizzly, miserable day and my throat has a bur in it and a few of the prickliest stickers have got down into my heart. I'm homesick and since I haven't any home I can't think what it is I am homesick for unless it is you, and I can't honestly see why I should be lonesome for you, seeing that I only had a glimpse of you a half dozen times during the two weeks I lived in yours and your sister's home and not at all since that never-to-be-forgotten day two years and seven months ago when you stood bare-headed on the pier and waved your handkerchief to Eleanor and me until you were only a speck that we could not see for our tears. So I can't make out the least rag of an excuse for being lonesome for you unless it is just the perversity of my nature. I always was an inconsistent little beast.

"It is awfully good to have Eleanor here with me again. I grew so terribly fond of her that first year that it nearly broke my heart when she went back to the States. And that long year that followed! x x x (Those crosses are for a few very expressive French words that I don't know how to spell.) The first thing I did, you will remember, was to move into different quarters. But even that didn't help much. I just moped around for days until finally M. Dupont threatened to send me back to you in disgrace if I didn't get back to work at my music. (He's an old dear, is M. Dupont,

but he's located every weak spot in me and he can make me dance to any tune he fiddles.) Then my pride came bubbling up to the surface and I began to work like forty steam engines with all their throttles open. But the year was eighty-seven months long and I don't care what any old calendar says. And then you sent her over on that flying trip with the Billy Nortons to look me over a bit and to see if I was studying like a good little girl and that brief visit fixed me up for a few months longer. Now she is here again and she declares she intends staying until she is tired of Paris. (Confidentially, Eleanor will never be tired of Paris.)

"All the Americans in Paris who happen to be on the same rung of the social ladder back in New York seem to get together and to stick together all the time they remain here and then when the season is ended they appear to migrate together. I guess I have told you about my surprise when I found that most of Eleanor's friends here were also friends of the man whose legacy my stepfather meant me to be. It seems that he is in Africa or some other equally distant place.

"Some of the Americans whom I have met are most interesting, and some are—I can't think of any word but 'outeresting.' There's a Brice Mathews (who, by-the-way, seems to have known you and Eleanor a very long time).

"Then there's a Mr. Edward Blaine, called the Mummy by his intimates. I suppose he came by that name because he is old and dry and musty, and, according to Carryl Langley, because he has *always* been old and dry and musty since he was old enough to vote. And there is Carryl Langley, of whom I just spoke. (Have I mentioned him in any of my previous letters?) He says it is his lot in life to advertise our indiscretions and escapades, which we fondly hoped were our most private secrets, thereby making us so ashamed that we stop being commandment-breakers. He calls himself a gossip. But he really isn't, you know. He's just

a very good man trying to be bad, and only succeeding in doing good with his badness. I suppose you know all about these people without my telling you, but you don't mind letting me tell you, do you?

"We've the dearest apartment! Has Eleanor written you about it? But of course she hasn't. She does hate letter writing. I suppose that is because she has so many people to write to. I just love to write letters and I *haven't* any one to write to, except you. When there is anything that ought to be written to you she always says, 'you tell him, dear. You like to write and, anyway, he can't read my writing.' So here goes for the apartment.

"It is beautifully located on the Boulevard Hausman. There is a tiny box of a drawing-room, two dear little sleeping-rooms (we never have guests over night, so we have no guest chambers. Eleanor says she always finds out just how far away her friends' homes are before inviting them to ours. I really don't know what we'd do if any one ever smuggled himself in, whose own living quarters were too far distant to be reached the same night, unless we gave him our one lone bathtub to sleep in and it is so short that he'd have to telescope or roll up to get into it), a living-room, where there isn't room to live, and the dining-room and kitchen, and of course the two maids' and butler's rooms. Outside each window there are cunning little balconies like the one at your house which Tiger used. (Poor old Tiger! Oh, dear, I guess I'll have to stop and cry a few minutes. Poor old fellow, no wonder he died when I left him. I'd have died too if I'd have been half as good as Tige. I cry about him lots of times when no one's around. Eleanor says I'm silly, but you won't think so, will you? I can't hold it in another second.)

"I feel better now. Even the stickers in my heart got washed out. Funny, when you just feel all choked up with grief about something, how a little rain of

your own purifies the atmosphere and washes the dust off your foliage. Why, I've even a rainbow now and I don't care a snap about the foolish old drizzle outside. I think I'll put on my coat and hat and go for my lesson.

"I wonder if the proverbial bag of gold waits at the end of her rainbow for

"Your obedient

"JEAN."

PARIS, March 12, 19—.

My Big Chief, why-don't-you-write:

"You know what the South Carolina senator said to the North Carolina senator. (*I never knew until Brice Mathews told me the other day.*) Well, it is a long time between letters from your side of the briny. You are not sick, are you, Big Chief? Did you wear that muffler, I made and sent you, every single day the past winter? And *were* you careful not to get your feet wet? You said, in one of your rare letters, that a man of your age was 'subject to all sorts of ailments that never brought a hearse to the door.' Now that was downright silly. You are not a bit old. Why you're just beginning to live at forty.

"I do wish you'd marry, Big Chief. Don't you think you'd be happier if you had some one to look after you? I do wish you'd consider it and if you *should* decide to 'chance it,' as Brice Mathews calls it, please cable and one of us will come right over. I wouldn't trust you to pick out a wife. You'd likely take some one that you happened to be sorry for just because she was in need of a home. You don't deceive Eleanor and me a bit with your sham hardness. We know that it's only a cloak to cover a gentleness that you're ashamed of. You bellowed at me terribly the day I came into your office and then when you ran across me a few hours later you took me home with you.

"Brice Mathews, the Billy Nortons, and a few other

of Eleanor's friends are making it very pleasant for us. There is always some little affair arranged for every day and evening but I don't always go. Some way I don't get the same thing out of those affairs that the others do. I guess being born by the sea and living so many years with no other world than the sea and a few scrub pines and a wide, wide sky has unfitted me for these smaller pleasures. Eleanor says that they are not 'small' at all but to me they are. When an orchestra plays something that makes every one else applaud I sit very still and think how much more beautiful was the lyric my ocean played and the sad little songs my pine trees sang.

"Billy Norton and Eve used to look at me with a great deal of wonder at first, and once Billy said, 'You're the dead ringer for a little girl that a crazy old man bequeathed to a friend of mine. It was several years ago that I saw her. Several of us went out to her home to see her. And say! She had eyes and hair and—and everything else exactly like yours, only she was a kid and—good Lord, what an original one!—Funny, isn't it, how two people can look so much alike?'

"Eleanor stood by her guns like the major she is, and with her very matter-of-factness convinced them that I was an orphaned niece from Omaha. Isn't that the place where pork packing is done? Why didn't you arrange with Eleanor to give me a more aristocratic city for my home town? Still, pork is not so bad!

"I had to stop writing for a moment, a messenger came with a huge box of flowers for me.

"Doesn't that sound like a grown-up young lady? They are from Brice Mathews. He is taking Eleanor and me to a dinner to-night. I'll have to conclude this right now and run and dress.

"Your happy
"JEAN."

Allen Hamilton folded the last and freshest looking

letter and laid it on his desk beside the first which was worn and finger marked.

"A grown-up young lady! Boxes of flowers and Brice Mathews!" he muttered as he looked out through his window into space.

"Old? Why I'm not half as old as I was two years and seven months ago! I've been rejuvenated. The blood in my veins is young but who will believe it with a lie like this on my head?"

He reached up and touched the patches of grey at his temples. His usually calm, expressionless eyes were full of bitterness and strange new lines marked themselves on his fine face.

"It is not right that age should be measured by days and weeks and years. I've seen men old and worn out at thirty and I've seen others with a sparkle in their eyes and a song in their hearts at sixty. The moment a man is born he is convicted and sentenced to old age and unless his sentence is shortened by death he goes on and serves his time and the insidious marks of service begin to show on his body despite his protests that he is not tired nor feeling the work or the passing of time. And, after a while, when his once smooth skin lies in ugly folds on his face and his hair that was once black is grizzled and grey, some one calls him 'old.' All his being rises up in righteous indignation but no one takes cognizance of the rebellion going on in his soul.

"'He is old,' they say,—'why try to deny it? His years number many. He has almost served his time. The youth in his heart is not real.' Ah, the tragedy of it! *He* knows it is real. But how can he hope to convince the world of it when there is only his voice against those of the multitude. He almost wishes there had been some way other than the grim one so many take to cheat the thing people call 'old age!'" He pushed back his chair and then went on with his thoughts.

"I wonder why the Deity found it necessary to place

the penalty of old age on the workers in his vineyard. Why could not He have allowed us to retain the elasticity in our step, the bloom in our cheeks and come to the end of our sentence with youth in our bodies as well as in our hearts? My heart aches for the women whose pathetic efforts to hide the marks of their long service are so pitifully futile. Every year shows its mark under the rouge. Dye does not bring the luster of youth back to the well coiffed hair. The gown, no matter what the cost or how skillful its creator, can not disguise the matronly lines. But, because their hearts are young, these dear old grandmothers make the effort to have their bodies appear so, and because their dear old eyes cannot see well without glasses and glasses have been ignored because they were a sort of acknowledgment of age they do not see clearly the pathetic picture their mirrors reflect. Dear old souls! They go stumbling along in their French heels, fondly hoping and believing that they are deceiving the world."

He sat silent a long time. The telephone buzzer at his elbow called for him twice and then it, too, was silent. The confused noises from the street below came faintly through the closed window. A pigeon paused for a second on the stone window-ledge and peered impertinently in at him. He neither heard the noises nor saw the inquisitive pigeon. What he saw was a girl and a shaggy cur dog and what he heard was the voice of Brice Mathews. How tender and loyal she was! Not a week in all those months had failed to bring a letter from her. And what palpitating, breathing things they were, those letters! He remembered how he had read them at first,—hastily and absent-mindedly and with a little smile of indulgence, then how a real interest had gradually awakened and he had read them slowly and with a keen understanding for all the little thoughts and ambitions she always laid bare to him. He had never told her what her letters had grown to mean to him. Had not even written her often.

But no seeming neglect on his part had made any difference in the frequency of the arrival of the closely written pages that wiped the cobwebs off his hurried, worried brain and made him forget for the time the terrifying temperaments of some of his stars.

He wondered if she would blame him for all her wasted ambitions when she should some day learn that her voice had nothing unusual in it. Would she think he had only been mistaken in his judgment of it? Or would she understand the truth,—that its cultivation had been but a ruse to give him the chance to protect and care for her? She would never forgive him if she knew the truth. Her rigid sense of honor would be outraged. He was glad she had become more reasonable about the account he kept for her at his Paris banking house. He supposed the pretty things in the shops had been too much for her and he knew, too, what an example of extravagance she had in Eleanor.

He shook himself and turned from the window. He must close "When a Man Tarries." It had had a long run but the audiences were beginning to thin out a little, and he liked always to terminate the run of a play when it apparently was still at its zenith. It was extremely bad policy to allow the public to discover that it was tired of a play and its players. It was fickle, that public, and it only continued to love a thing indefinitely if that thing were taken away from it before it had had a surfeit of it.

What was it she had said about Brice Mathews making it pleasant for her?

It was absurd for Agnes Van Style to be always at swords points with her company. She had ruined the disposition of at least four ingénues and three leading men in the last two seasons. He would have to be more severe with her.

How passionately he regretted the grey at his temples and the too numerous years that stalked like mocking, unsatisfied phantoms behind him!

He shook himself again and swung impatiently round in his swivel chair.

"I'm a doddering old fool! Getting sentimental and silly. I've always had myself so thoroughly in hand that I never expected to grow senile. Here I am day-dreaming like a schoolgirl and a hundred letters waiting for that pig of a stenographer's pad and pencil and at least half that many people outside clamoring to see me."

Picking up the two letters from where they lay on his desk he thrust them into a little drawer with a package of others. Then he closed and locked it with a roughness that was almost savage.

CHAPTER VI

WHY itemize, Brice, when you know very well that she is *all* perfect."

The words as his hostess spoke them sounded to Billy Norton like some echo from a long ago. The picture of a young girl with angry dark eyes rose up before him and for an instant the old suspicion that Hazel Hamilton Willis and that defiant young girl were one and the same, came back to him. But in another instant it was gone and he listened to Brice's answer with a little smile.

"No one is denying that she is perfect. She *is*. But I wanted only to remind you of a few of her most marvelous perfections."

"Brice Mathews, if you dare to get serious with that child before she's had her fling at this corrupted thing we call society I'll—I'll——" his pretty hostess paused, trying to think of a word expressive enough to suit her, "annihilate you," she finished.

"You haven't met her, have you, Jim?"

She turned to a man who leaned gracefully against a huge Chinese vase at her right. The man smiled his amusement and shook his head.

"Then you might as well prepare for the slaughter, for she'll slay you with one look from her starry eyes."

"Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Bobbie, but you seem to have forgotten that Jim is invulnerable. If I thought any one would think it original I would say that Jim Atherton was the rock of Gibraltar where women were concerned and that there was not one of them whose onslaught could budge him in the least," put in Billy Norton across his wife's satiny shoulder.

"I'm not so sure about that, Billy," said a plump lit-

tle woman, and she smiled at Jim Atherton a little maliciously. "You know he once thought himself in love with Winifred Blake, or allowed others to think so. Her unexpected marriage to the Mummy only turned the affair into one of platonic friendship, though of course there *are* those who whisper——"

"Those who whisper are usually *afraid* to speak aloud, Mrs. Burns." The man still leaned lazily against the Chinese vase but a cat-like tenseness had crept into the sinews of his well developed body and his voice had a note of warning in it as he interrupted the plump little woman with the malicious smile. "There are only two people of all those whom I happen to know who never stoop to whisper. Those two are yourself and Carryl Langley, and I've always wondered a little that you two never made a match of it. You were hardly suited to dear old Rex, why I don't think Rex even '*whispers*' about his friends."

"I *am* a mean, catty old scandalmonger, Jim, and I sometimes marvel that I've lived this long with an uninjured neck. I don't whisper my scandal. I shriek it from the housetops. Some day some one will try to still my busy tongue and when that time comes I should not be at all surprised to find it is you who rescues me, you old lion hunter. Welcome back from Africa, Jim!"

A ripple of relieved laughter swept over the group near the big double doors; but the interesting topic that had held them together was forgotten. In a moment they were scattering and a new group was forming around the charming hostess as she stood at the entrance to the ballroom to receive her guests.

Jim Atherton, tall and straight as a Greek god, his handsome face tanned to a healthy bronze, locked arms with Brice Mathews and the two of them strolled away toward the far end of the room.

"Mrs. Eleanor Hamilton Rollins and Miss Hazel Willis," announced the butler and immediately a flutter of

excitement was apparent in the newly assembled group.

Eleanor Rollins came first, radiant in a gorgeous gown of gold cloth and old rose brocade, her yellow gold hair piled high on her proud little head and her blue eyes laughing in anticipation of the evening before her. A few steps behind her came Jeanne Delaine or Hazel Willis, as these people knew her. She was dressed in white, what the material was does not matter. Nobody ever looked at her gown a second time or at all for that matter if he happened to see her face first. The gown was lacking the train, which was so popular, and was otherwise girlishly youthful.

She entered the room with the air of a sleep walker. There was no sign of consciousness in the exquisitely chiseled face as it looked straight ahead into the brilliantly lighted room. It was as calm and unmoved as a piece of marble statuary but a close observer might have seen the sudden dilation of the pupils of her velvety eyes and the spasmodic closing and opening of one slim white hand. It was her first formal dance and excitement ran riot in her warm blooded veins.

"And this is Mr. Rathbone and this, my dear, is the M. Louveau—without whom no social affair is complete, —and this is—and this——"

Her hostess' voice drifted away and became one with the music that came to her over the heads of the swaying, moving crowd. What did their names matter? She had only to bow and smile and seem to listen to the suave, flattering things they said. Her heart was free to beat in all its gypsy madness so long as her mechanical answers sufficed.

She allowed her eyes to travel leisurely over the great high ceilinged room. Its walls were dark with the stain of centuries and here and there pieces of priceless tapestry concealed the old carved panels. Palms and festoons of flowers were everywhere and between the four walls moved a living kaleidoscope of color. Every demand of her artistic soul was satisfied. She sighed

a little sigh of appreciation and the man who had taken her arm, after asking and receiving permission to show her Mrs. Bobbie's conservatory, looked down at her curiously.

"Are you not well?" he asked gently.

"Oh, yes, quite, thank you," and the girl flashed at him a dazzling smile which made him stammer like a boy fresh from college.

"You see," he was saying a little later when they had seated themselves near a great trailing vine the branches and foliage of which formed a canopy over a rose bordered path and the trunk of which was twisted and gnarled as the joints of a very old man who has had to work hard for his daily bread, "when Mrs. Bobbie Carter's aunt, the much loved Lady Blatchford, bought this old place it was almost a wreck. But she set to work, and because she was possessed of an eye for beauty and an open check book she evolved this magnificent place which has become one of the glories of Paris. This is the first formal affair Mrs. Bobbie has given since she came into possession of it by the death of her aunt and we are all, naturally, a little excited over it. We are looking forward to many other such times, for Mrs. Bobbie is sure to keep up the reputation of the place for lavish entertainments and gay social functions."

The lord-who-ever-he-was kept on talking, evidently thinking that the girl by his side was enjoying it as much as he was. But the girl heard his voice rather than his words and smiled an occasional polite smile or bowed an occasional affirmation while her pulses throbbed and her delicate nostrils drank in the intoxicating fragrance of the place and her ears caught at the faint strains of music which floated in from the ballroom.

"I say,—wouldn't you like me to get you an ice?" the man asked for the third time, wondering a little if her hearing were good. The thought never occurred to him

that she might not be as interested in his monologue as he was himself.

"Oh, I—yes, I *would* like an ice, thank you."

He bowed himself out of her presence and a little twinkle came into the girl's dark eyes.

"Goodness, I'm glad he's gone. I don't see how *he* got into heaven."

She glanced about her appreciatively.

Suddenly she discovered a miniature fountain at the end of a long green vista and she sat very still contemplating it; her eyes widened, her red lips parted and her brain became very busy with thinking of all the things which that fountain stood for. Then, with that sure instinct that was a sixth sense with her, she felt another's presence near her and lifted her head. Jim Atherton stood before her, staring at her as if she were a ghost, his face a little pale under the tan and his clear blue eyes full of startled wonder.

Jeanne had always known that they must meet some day and she had tried to school herself for that time. But the shock swept over her like an avalanche when she lifted her head and looked up into his eyes. Here was the man who owned her or thought he did,—the man to whom her stepfather had bequeathed her—together with his gun and boat and ailing horse.

An almost forgotten fury came back to her heart and unreasonably aimed itself at the man who had been in no way to blame.

"Are you real flesh and blood or just the result of that confounded absinthe Brice Mathews insisted upon my drinking?"

It was part of the inconsistency of her nature that his voice, in its very first word, should calm her shrieking nerves instead of throwing them into a greater riot as might have been expected. She reached up one slim hand and patted into place a stubborn black curl that had fallen down against her white neck. Then, just as leisurely she opened and closed her fan a couple

of times and staring at him a little frigidly across its top she answered with a composure worthy of some one older in experience than a débutante,

"If you continue to stare at me in that manner I will begin to fear that I *am* a product of your absinthe. You had better find your friend who insisted on the drink and get under his care immediately."

Jim Atherton's face flushed painfully. He stood quite still for a second, looking silently down at her while the color slowly receded, leaving only the tan of wind and sun where the red had been.

"I have spent the last few years foolishly regretting that you ran away from me," he said. "I have felt that I had lost a wonderful thing out of my life,—a thing that you could have made possible for me. I have always been alone. I've missed, dreadfully, the ties that other men have. When you came into my life,—even before I had seen you, I began to think of you as 'my family' and when I lost you—I really grieved and spent a great many good American dollars trying to find you." He paused, sighed and then laughed. "I can see now how fortunate I was. There isn't a man in the world with sufficient good nature to be at the head of a family like you."

"I haven't the remotest idea of what you are talking. Is it possible that you have mistaken me for some one else? Or is it the eloquence of absinthe?"

"I could not be mistaken, you are——"

"Miss Hazel Willis."

"Then you are not——"

"I am not."

Jim Atherton passed his hand, in dazed wonder, across his perplexed eyes.

"I beg your pardon. I had forgotten what several of my friends have told me about a girl in the American colony here who so closely resembled another girl whom we knew. The—er—resemblance is certainly remarkable, except, of course, that you are a young lady and

she was a child who could scarcely have matured so wonderfully in so short a time, now that I come to think of it. But your eyes are the same, and your mouth, and your hair, too, except that yours is coiled in a knot at your neck and my little girl's hair hung far down her back in two long black braids." He looked down at her a little wistfully and sighed.

"I hope you will pardon me, Miss Willis. If ever I find my little girl I should like to bring her to see you."

"I should be very interested, thank you," answered the girl, turning smilingly toward her escort who was approaching from an opposite direction bearing a small silver tray.

For the first time in his life Jim Atherton made an awkward exit from the presence of a lady. Once inside the ballroom he lost no time in locating Brice Mathews. The latter stood near an open window looking out into the night, a cool breath of spring stirring the hair on his brow.

Atherton touched his arm and he turned from the window, a faraway look in his nice brown eyes.

"Mooning, Brice?"

"You might call it that, if you like."

"Brice, I've just finished making an ass of myself."

"Well, you're not going to try to hire me as stable boy, are you?"

"No. You are not competent. You wouldn't know how to manage me and I might kick you."

They both laughed and then, as though not wanting to talk for the moment, they looked out over the dancers, gay in their beautiful plumage, weaving, with swaying bodies and fairy-like feet, a fantasy of intoxicating joy. Over there was the Mummy and their hostess, Mrs. Bobbie Carter, pirouetting and flirting outrageously. And there at the far end were Eleanor Rollins and the Duc de Gourman, keeping well away from the flying crowds. At the left near the palm-hidden orchestra was good old Billy Norton, who defied all social cus-

toms, and Mother Grundy as well, by always dancing with his wife until Mrs. Burns had said there were "whispers" about them! And coming toward them was Lord Halborough looking down into the sweet, girlish face of Hazel Willis.

The two men turned automatically and both pairs of eyes sought those of the small upturned face. There were dream visions in their depths that left no room for material things and when Lord Halborough had guided his partner away from the two silent men near the window and only the breath of an American beauty rose remained to tell of the girl who had worn it the two men faced each other guiltily.

"That man thinks she is smiling at him. Fool! She has a habit of smiling at things which no one else sees. She lives in a little universe all her own! I shouldn't be at all surprised if she turned out to be a Joan of Arc and would begin telling us about the 'voices.' There isn't anything in the world like her, Jim."

"Except the little girl I inherited, Brice."

Brice glanced at his friend curiously.

"Have you met Miss Willis?"

"Yes."

"You noticed the striking likeness, then, which Billy Norton has advertised?"

"I am not blind."

"Well, look here, Jim, forget it. It is nothing more than a likeness and the poor girl has been annoyed enough about that ungrateful little waif."

"I can understand that,—only please do not refer again to the other one in quite that language, Brice, old boy. I have just finished adding my share of annoyance to Miss Willis' already heavy load. I might say that I added more than my share. I suppose you have all made it equally pleasant for her as each of you in turn have met her."

"Yes, and poor Billy was worse than the rest, Jim. He said he just couldn't believe she was not the same

girl who sat in the hammock on that old tumble down porch and mocked him and the rest of you."

"Has every one of our crowd met her, Brice?"

"I believe so."

Jim hesitated and then asked, a little too carelessly:

"What does Winifred think?"

"What the rest of us know,—that it is only a remarkable resemblance."

After a brief silence:

"Brice, where do they keep that confounded absinthe?"

CHAPTER VII

THE first pink flush of dawn was in the sky and the occasional rattle of wagon wheels or the clatter of a horse's hoofs hinted at the awakening of the city as Eleanor Rollins and her little protégée entered their apartment.

Creeping on tiptoe past the sleeping maid who lay stretched out on a lounge at Eleanor's door the two breathless culprits slipped noiselessly into Hazel's room.

"There," sighed the girl, as she closed the door carefully behind them, "we're safe. Can't we have that board fixed,—the one that squeaks so? It is almost impossible to miss it coming across my threshold unless one takes an awfully long step, and you know, *ma chère*, how unmaidenly that is." She crossed to the windows and drew down the blinds and then made a funny little moue at the gorgeous creature in old rose and gold who had curled up in a huge armchair as if she intended staying there until the end of Time.

"I have to shut out the dawn or I can never get to sleep. I have to pretend that it's a decent hour or I'll just lie awake the rest of the night—or morning or whatever it is."

"Did you have a nice time, Hazel?"

"Yes, but not a satisfying one."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't quite know, myself, Eleanor. I only know that just when I was happiest the thought of that wretched 'bread line' we saw outside that bakery on our way there always thrust itself into my head. And then, too, there was a vague feeling all the time that the place and the people were not real. Physically

real, yes,—but not exactly the things they were trying to make each other believe they were, and once or twice I thought I heard a faint moan or sigh come from those proud old paneled walls.”

An amused smile played around the older woman's pretty lips.

“Hazel, what did you drink in the refreshment room?”

“What I always do, a mineral water. But it isn't a thing to be laughed away, I tell you. I had a nice time but it has left a bad taste in my mouth.”

“What a mad little dreamer you are, *ma petite chère*. Listen, is that Smith?”

Hazel listened at the door, one small pink ear pressed tight against the white enameled panel, her loosed gown falling away from her milk white shoulders.

“No, it is only that silly cuckoo clock in the dining-room. Oh, but I'm glad it wasn't Smith! I'd never get off with less than *two* cups of hot tea and maybe a mustard foot bath if Smith ever awoke and found we'd just crept in at this appalling hour. Really, Eleanor, don't you think that I'm old enough to be exempt from the tea and mustard foot baths?”

“We'll write Allen about it. I shouldn't dare take all the responsibility on my own shoulders.” Eleanor drew her lips down in mock seriousness.

There was a wild dash from the door and the next instant a soft white evening gown lay in a crumpled heap on the floor and two slim hands were lost in a mass of golden hair.

“You fraud! You don't want me to grow up! You're trying to keep me a little girl so you will have something to play with. Will you let me be big? Big as I want to be? Will you? Will you?” With each word she shook the golden head playfully.

“Yes! Yes! You can even learn to knit woolen socks and wear little white caps if you'll only let me go, you young savage.”

Hazel slid to the floor, withdrawing her fingers from

the golden hair as she did so. Then with a victorious little gurgle of laughter in her throat she kicked off her white satin slippers and began drawing off her long silken stockings.

"Why aren't you undressing, Eleanor? You said you didn't need Smith but I'm afraid that you do, unless you will let me help," she finished suddenly, looking up into the older woman's face with tender solicitude.

"I'm troubled, dear, and I don't think I can sleep, so I'm in no hurry about getting my things off unless my sitting here for a while will disturb you."

The girl on the floor at her feet sprang up in quick contrition.

"I'm a selfish beast. I've chatted away about the time I've had and I've not even asked if you had enjoyed the affair. And now that I look at you more closely I know that you didn't. Something has happened, something that troubles you. What is it, *ma chère*?"

Eleanor Rollins threw one bare white arm along the back of her chair and buried her face on it. Hazel dropped on her knees and gently but firmly drew the bowed head to her naked young breast.

"What is it, dear?" she whispered.

"Oh, it is only the same old trouble, the same miserable thing again."

"Not that, Eleanor. Why, how could it be? You did not play to-night."

There came a worried look in Hazel's eyes and a sickening pain in her heart but her voice was calm and her arms tightened their hold on the golden head as she spoke.

"It was this afternoon." The woman on her breast was sobbing now.

"At the Nortons' tea? I didn't know they were to play. I'd have gone if I'd have known.—How much is it this time, Eleanor?"

"Twenty thousand francs."

The girl stood bravely erect and her arms did not

slacken their hold but her lovely face paled and the furnishings of the room swam round her in mad confusion. After a long silence:

"Why don't you say something?" The words came plaintively from the face buried against her shivering flesh.

"I'm thinking, Eleanor. We haven't that much on deposit at the bank and there isn't another security to be sold. I suppose you gave an I. O. U."

"Yes."

"How much time on it?"

"Thirty days."

"Have you thought of any way of meeting it when it falls due?"

"None, except"—there was a pause and the golden head pressed a trifle closer to the encircling young arms, "the way we've met them before."

"But there was a generous balance at the bank then and when there wasn't you had securities and valuable jewels. We don't seem to have any of those things to turn to now."

"But Allen would send twice that amount if he knew we needed it."

"Yes, if he knew we needed it," the girl echoed, careful to use the pronoun "we." "But," she went on, "we can't let him know."

"Why not?" a little irritably.

"Because it is not fair."

"I shall go mad if you waste time talking about what is or is not fair. You've got to write to Allen." Then, more pleadingly, "you will, won't you, darling?"

"I don't know what I shall do. But run along to bed now, like a good dear, and rest in the knowledge that I will do something. But, Eleanor, I may fail you the next time, so don't let there be a next time, dear."

Eleanor's sobbing stopped almost at once and when she lifted her face she was smiling a relieved little smile through the tears in which her eyes were still swimming.

"You're a brick, as Allen would say. I knew you would fix it some way. There, I've got my nose all red and the lace on your underslip looks as if it had been out in a rainstorm. I'm going straight to bed and if you do not promise to go, too, I'll call Smith to brew the tea and get the mustard water ready," and with a tight hug of her arms around the younger girl's neck and a gay little laugh she was gone and the door had closed softly behind her.

The girl stood for a long time just as the woman had left her; her hands clasped tightly in front of her, her eyes still gazing at the door through which the gay smiling face had disappeared; her under lip caught between her white little teeth and a drop of blood oozing out where one sharp tiny tooth had cut through the skin.

She looked very young as she stood there, the almost boyish lines of her slim young body showing through the thin, white material of her night robe. Her long hair, from which she had drawn the pins, hanging like a shadowy cloud almost to her knees, and tiny curls clustering against the ivory brow and around the sweet face with its wide frightened eyes.

The call of the cuckoo clock came faintly in to her and seemed to snap the cord that had held her so rigid. Her head dropped until it rested on her breast. Then suddenly stretching out her slender young arms she fell across the foot of her snowy bed. There were no sobs, and although the cuckoo clock called several times again she never moved, but lay just as she had fallen, face down on the spotless white spread. One might have thought that she slept had not the slim hands continued to clasp and unclasp nervously.

Long before Eleanor Rollins opened her blue eyes and rang sleepily for Smith, a dark-eyed girl crept out of the house and hurried down the street. For more than half an hour she walked, hurrying along, turning this way and that, her little heels clattering in a not unmusical rhythm, her eyes looking straight ahead of her,

her lips pressed together in a stern little line. When she reached the cable office she stopped, took a deep breath as though preparing for a dive into very deep, very cold water, and resolutely entered. At a wall desk she found a pad of paper and wrote:

"Mr. Allen Hamilton, Esq.,
"Cosmopolitan Opera House,
"New York, N. Y., U. S. A.

"Need four thousand dollars. Can't explain. Mortgage voice.

"JEAN."

There was a spot of vivid red in each of Hazel's cheeks as she entered the dining-room a little later. Eleanor Rollins kissed either red cheek and pinched them playfully.

"Out for a brisk walk, eh? It has done you a world of good and so did your sleep. Your face is like that American Beauty you wore last night. Ah, the buoyancy of youth! Now I dare say that I slept as well as you but look at me. I'm terribly jaded. I am simply all fagged out, my dear. Do remove your hat and please to ring for Blake. Then sit down and let me feast my eyes on you."

There followed a long silence in which Hazel removed her jaunty French hat, gave the signal to Blake for breakfast to be served and seated herself behind the dainty silver percolator.

Eleanor moved about the room rearranging the clusters of flowers in the vases and bowls that were scattered here and there on tables, shelves and buffet. Finally she, too, seated herself at the table and then as she carefully buttered a thin piece of toast she glanced across at Hazel with:

"Have you thought of a way out?"

"I have cabled your brother."

"Not that I——"

"No, that *I* needed it."

There was a new note in the girl's voice but the young woman at the other end of the table was too engrossed in her own charming self to notice it.

"Hazel, you are a darling! I knew you could arrange it some way. You managed it for me each time before and last night or rather this morning I went to sleep the moment my head had touched the pillow, so positive was I that you would clear away my troubles. Now I can go to that art exhibit at the Langley studio this afternoon and enjoy every minute of it and of course I could never have gone at all if I still had that wretched load on my mind and I can't tell you, dear, how I would have hated missing it."

"Will you be back here for dinner or are you dining out?"

"Why, Hazel, you speak as if you were not going."

"I'm not, Eleanor."

"Why?"

"I want to practice. I've a difficult lesson for tomorrow."

"Is that the only reason, dear?"

"I would rather not answer."

"Why, Hazel?"

"Because I am naturally disinclined to lie, Eleanor. Now don't bother your pretty head another bit about me but get out and away just as soon as you can."

"I can't understand why you will not practice when I am home, dear. Do you realize that I have not heard your singing voice for more than two years, not since the time when you came home from that pig of a Frenchman's studio and told me with angry flashing eyes that for some unexplained reason M. Dupont had forbidden you to again sing for anyone but him until he gave you that permission. It is not that foolish demand that is robbing me, is it, dear?"

"M. Dupont is my good instructor to whom your generous brother has been paying and still will pay vast

sums of money and I am glad to do all that he tells me, knowing, as I do, that he will advise me rightly."

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders in a thoroughly French fashion and arose from the table.

"I wish that I had some of you in me, dear. I'd be a much better composite woman than I am as just myself."

"You are very beautiful and dear as 'just yourself,' Eleanor. Don't cry for the moon. You might find it only green cheese after all."

"Au revoir, you old philosopher. I shall not be home to dinner. I'm dining at the Ritz with the Mummy and Winifred. Sorry you wouldn't accept."

There was the click of her dainty French heels down the corridor and then a popular air in Eleanor's high pitched, rather shrill voice came back to the dining-room where Hazel sat, her untouched plate pushed from her, her wide velvety eyes staring unseeingly at the silver percolator.

Life was surely a queer game. Just when she thought she had learned to play it she always found that the rules had been changed while she slept. Fate had done many things with her, had buffeted her around like a favorite piece of drift wood from which it hated to let go. She could endure the rest of the buffeting, but her whole nature recoiled at this new part Fate was giving her to play. What must her dear good benefactor think of her? His possible opinion turned her faint with nausea. And yet,—what else could she have done? Better a thousand times have him think what he *did* think than that he should know his sister's weakness. Always every penny of Eleanor's income was spent before it reached her. Most of her jewels were gone and (her heart ached at the thought) every cent he had each month so generously deposited at the bank of Crédit-Lyonais for herself. Not a penny of it had ever gone for her own personal expenses. She had taught English in another quarter of the city almost from the very be-

ginning, earning enough to pay for her simple clothing and a meager share of the table bills. And in spite of all that, he must always think——

"I'm off to my modiste, Hazel, au revoir, dear." In the door stood a radiant vision in royal blue silk, blowing a kiss from its white gloved fingertips. Hazel smiled and blew a kiss back to her and a moment later she heard the horn of the taxi as it left the curbing in front of the building.

CHAPTER VIII

THE thirty days of grace which Eleanor Rollins had said she had on her I. O. U. had almost expired before the required amount arrived from America.

Allen's reply to Hazel's letter was characteristic of the man. It merely asked if she were making foreign investments and suggested keeping their capital at home as much as possible, etc., etc., with a command at the end to take good care of her voice, *as he had accepted the mortgage!*

To his sister he wrote:

"Are you sure you're taking good care of our little girl, Eleanor? I have felt rather uneasy about her of late. She appears to be spending more money than is good for her and I can't understand it. She seemed to be such an independent little thing, so unwilling to accept favors at first that this sudden change puzzles me. My only hope is that she has but formed extravagant habits and that she has not become the victim of any fast set.

"Sometimes I think that I ought to run over there and look after the two of you for a while, but I just don't get started. I seem to grow closer into my office each year. I am so old and cranky that you'd both be bored to death if I did come."

Summer was creeping into the city and each succeeding day seemed more beautiful than the one gone before. A few had hurried away to the seashore but there were still gay little dinners, merry informal dances and automobile parties with long rides into the country

and Eleanor Rollins was always one of the merriest of her particularly merry set. Occasionally Hazel was persuaded to make one of the gay, irresponsible crowd and always at those times the other ladies of the party found themselves shamefully neglected by the opposite sex. But the girl had smiled back innocently into the faces of the men and remained charmingly unaware of their admiration for herself.

Jim Atherton was the most regular attendant at all these social affairs but he did not always remain longer than the arrival of the last guest. Mrs. Rex Burns had said that there were "whispers" to the effect that Atherton always stayed only long enough to discover whether or not Eleanor Rollins came alone. But, then, every one laughed at Mrs. Burns' "whispers."

He had not devoted himself to Hazel more than to any one else, but once during a reception, at the Billy Nortons, Winifred Blaine had made her way through the throng to where he stood gazing abstractedly at a couple who sat half hidden behind a group of palms. She stood silent and unobserved beside him for a while. Then touching his arm she looked up at him and spoke, making small effort to hide her irritation.

"Do you find her so interesting, Jim?"

"Of whom are you speaking, Winifred?" he asked, looking down at her with a little surprise and just a trace of defiance.

The woman laughed a hard unmusical laugh.

"Of whom, indeed, but the girl at whom you have been staring all evening. The girl at whom you always stare."

"Haven't your watchful eyes discovered that the 'Mummy' also finds her good to look upon?"

He glanced meaningly in the direction of the man whom all their world knew this woman had married for the unlimited material things he could give her and at a time when she had been in a temper against Jim Atherton, her fiancé.

Winifred Blaine shrugged her white shoulders indifferently.

"He is apt to find anything in petticoats good to look upon, but you,—I thought you were different."

"I am not 'different,' if by that you mean that I fail to recognize real gold where there is so much brass."

"Jim! I didn't know you could say such cutting things!"

"You invite them."

The lips of the blond woman trembled beyond her control and her ring-laden fingers clutched the man's arm convulsively.

"Jim, I can't go on like this. It is killing me. Won't you——"

"Hush, Winifred. We have gone over all of this before. You are my friend's wife——"

"That is only your pitiful excuse!"

"Besides," continued the man, ignoring her interruption, "you do not mean what you are saying." He looked the woman squarely in the eyes, spoke more slowly and with a trifle more emphasis, "you—are—jesting."

And so the days had slipped by with their small affairs and their smaller gossips until the morning came when Allen's letters lay waiting beside two thin white plates in a tiny dining-room on the Boulevard Haussmann. Eleanor Rollins pushed her letter aside and between gently patted yawns picked half sleepily at a bunch of grapes. She smiled a lazy "good-morning" as Hazel entered the room and marveled a little, as she never failed to do each morning, at the girl's ever increasing loveliness.

Eagerly Hazel broke the seal of her letter from Allen, and Eleanor glanced at her a little anxiously from time to time as the dark head bent above the closely scrawled pages.

"It is from your brother." The girl had finished and now as she looked across at her friend she wondered

that another letter from the same source should be lying unopened at the other's plate.

"Yes, I also have one, as you see."

"But you have not yet opened yours?"

"No, I dread learning any kind of news first hand. I like better to have some one else get it first and then to break it to me gently."

There was a whimsical smile on her delicate face but her tone was more than half serious.

"There is no one in the world so spoiled as you, Eleanor. I wonder if there will always be some one to 'break the news to you gently.'"

"Yes, there will be, for the very good reason that I will never wander far from those who can and will do it."

Hazel gazed at her with wide somber eyes. How irresponsible she was—a gaily colored butterfly who owed allegiance to nothing, to whom life and gorgeous beauty had come from the death and decay of a worm! She was herself, without trying to be anything else. She measured Time by her entrance into the world just as does the butterfly who comes without parents or other kin.

"Are you disapproving of me, Hazel, dear?" she smiled saucily across the top of her coffee cup.

"I was, but when you smile at me like that I can't keep it up. You *are* ravishingly beautiful, aren't you?"

"Mrs. Rex Burns says it is so 'whispered,' " conceded Eleanor, at which they both laughed.

"And now for the news, dear."

Hazel fingered her letter thoughtfully for a moment and then at a slight cough from her friend she lifted her head and looked across into the anxious blue eyes that tried so hard to appear unconcerned.

"It is all right. The money is at the bank for us."

She was always careful to include herself in any of these money discussions.

"Oh, I am glad that is settled. Do you remember when that wretched note falls due?"

Hazel frowned, a little impatient at this show of fine indifference. She hesitated a second, getting her tongue under perfect control before replying, and then in her usual sweet, clear voice she said:

"I believe it falls due the day after to-morrow."

Eleanor stretched her pretty arms above her head and sighed.

"Pardonnez-moi. I am still sleepy. And I must dress for that drive to Deuville. Are you going?"

"I have promised to go."

Eleanor's eyes narrowed speculatively as she asked:

"Whom did you promise, Hazel?"

"Brice Mathews," the girl answered frankly with no hint of confusion.

Eleanor smiled a world-wise smile into her plate. Hazel, blissfully unconscious of it, went at her breakfast with all the animal hunger of a human being gloriously young and healthy in body and mind.

Breakfast over, they ran to their rooms to dress for the long ride to Deuville where they, with their "crowd"—would remain for the week-end.

Hazel's door had scarcely closed behind her before each little shoe had been kicked from her feet and her thin breakfast gown, still warm from her body, hung from its accustomed hook.

Like a careless boy who never thinks of his mirror, who slides into his clothes with a speed and ease which creates an undying envy in the hearts of his sisters, Hazel ran about the room, from closet to drawer and from drawer to closet dropping various things over her dark head and fastening them en route.

When the last button had been fastened and the last ribbon tied she turned to the long beveled mirror and made a little grimace at the piquant face that looked back at her. Her dress was a thin white material which stopped at throat and elbows, leaving her slender neck

and her fore arms bare. Her raven hair lay in a glistering black coil against the nape of her snowy neck and unruly little curls had already worked themselves loose and fell in maddening confusion around her brow and small pink ears.

"I think you'll do, Jean, that is if you don't get all mussed up before you get out of the house. Eleanor says you don't 'stay fixed' worth a cent, and you must confess that you do come home looking disreputable, as a rule. Now please remember to-day and to-morrow that you are a grown-up young lady and leave the foot-racing and fence vaulting to the men. And don't wipe all the grease off the automobiles. Remember it's put on them for a purpose." She made another grimace at her saucy reflection, pinned a wide brimmed straw hat on which was a single bright red poppy on her dark head, fastened her small hand grip, in which were the things she would need while away, and then sighed regretfully:

"The person who invented all these unnecessary necessities was not an inventor at all. He was a criminal!"

"Isn't it time they were here?" she cried when a second later she threw herself into a low, cretonne-covered chair in Eleanor's room.

Eleanor thrust a silk clad foot into the small white canvas shoe her maid held out for her, stamped the foot into place and then turned a cloudy face toward the cretonne covered chair.

"Don't you dare tell me to hurry. You know that it always makes me nervous. You wouldn't be dressed either if you had to make all those little curls with a hot iron that a reckless maid jabbed against your head occasionally, or if your skin were not so velvety and had to be creamed and massaged and tinted and powdered to get a decent effect,—oh, get out of here, you young imp!"

She shook a slipper threateningly at the girl in the chair who stuck her thumbs in her pretty ears and wig-

gled her fingers in derision at the satin slipper. The instant before it whirled through the air the chair was empty and Hazel was skipping down the corridor laughing merrily.

The slipper struck the closed door. A tantalizing shout of laughter came back to the room. Eleanor answered it with one equally merry and the maid smiled surreptitiously behind her mistress' golden head.

When Brice Mathews was shown into the little drawing-room, ten minutes before the time of his appointment, he found Hazel, already hatted and gloved, waiting for him. She came forward with a warm smile and an impulsively outstretched hand.

"I'm glad that you made me promise to go to-day. It's so heavenly glorious out of doors and the country will be wonderful!"

"I, too, am glad, because—you are heavenly glorious and wonderful." He took her hand in both his own and looked hungrily into the lovely eyes raised to his.

"Now you are spoiling it, sir. I forbade you saying those things to me. You know I did. I shall not enjoy the day one bit if you are going to be anything but my usual good friend."

"Hazel, you make it awfully hard for a fellow. But I'll try to be nothing more human than a protoplasm all day if it will make you happy." He released her hand and glanced at his watch.

"You are the first woman I ever knew or even heard of who was ever ready on time,—who didn't keep a man fidgeting about an empty drawing-room until his desire to see her had entirely vanished. What? Oh, yes, I beg your pardon. I see right now that I'm going to have a very difficult day."

They both laughed and by the time they were seated in the big motor car in front of the building their old camaraderie had descended upon them.

It was in fact a glorious day and as the car went spinning down the sunlit avenues the girl and the man chatted

gaily and laughed often. When an occasional corner was turned on two wheels and the girl was thrown against the man, the brief contact of her body with his sent the camaraderie flying away from the man and allowed something warmer to take its place. Always the man had to square his broad shoulders and put up a good fight to get a strangle hold on that elusive camaraderie again, and though it usually took him several minutes, the girl never noticed.

At L—— they had a "blowout" and as the chauffeur and Brice Mathews worked and perspired and cursed under their breath Hazel sat idly watching a few fleecy clouds and hummed the air of a mad little song of the hour. Eleanor, the Billy Nortons, and the Duc de Gourman in the latter's car and the Mummy Blaines in their long low racer passed them with gay shouts and waving hands, leaving clouds of dust behind them. When the dust had settled back to earth the long, straight country road was empty. Brice and his man had finished the repairs and had walked back a few rods to a small stone house that nestled in the midst of a group of trees at the side of the road to wash their hands when Jim Atherton's car slid silently up beside the dead car and stopped.

He looked very big and handsome as he removed his goggles and turned his tanned face toward the girl who sat bareheaded and alone humming the air of the little French song. She gazed at him steadily for an instant, continuing to hum and then as he spoke and took off his cap two little dimples came into her cheeks and her eyes crinkled mischievously at the corners.

"It's awfully good of you to stop. The rest of our solicitous friends just waved their hands and left us their dust."

"Where's Brice?" He had jumped from his car and now stood on the ground looking up at her with cool, unfathomable blue eyes.

"Gone back to a farmhouse to wash off the damages."

"Is he driving himself to-day?"

"Why, no. He would have used his roadster had he wished to do the driving. He would scarcely have need for this seat."

"I suppose he can devote himself more exclusively to your charming self when his man is at the wheel." He smiled and, as always, Hazel felt an intangible something in his smile which annoyed her. She was never quite at her ease with this man. Whether it was because she was afraid that he suspected the fraud she was practising upon him by representing herself to be some one she was not, or whether because her hands always grew strangely cold when he happened to be near her, she could not tell. And now as she smiled back at him it cost her no small effort to appear at ease and nonchalant.

"Do you men all keep chauffeurs for that purpose only?"

Jim laughed good naturedly and a gleam of appreciation for her quick wit lighted up his rather grave eyes.

"Hello, there! Why didn't you show up a bit sooner?" It was Brice who came round the car suddenly and slapped Jim on the back.

"Why didn't you let me know that you needed me?"

"We're not equipped with wireless yet, are we, Hazel?"

At the inclusion of the girl, Jim glanced quickly at her lovely face. But the flush he evidently expected to find on her smooth skin was not there. It was its usual old ivory with perhaps just a darker tone that the early summer winds and suns were adding.

With a few words more the men seated themselves, and the two machines started, Jim Atherton taking the lead. At Lisieux they stopped for luncheon.

The rest of their party were already on the piazza of the Grand Hotel at Deuville when they arrived, and every one nodded and smiled knowingly as Brice lifted

Hazel tenderly and set her on the ground. The nods and smiles did not escape Jim, and two deep lines gathered between his brows.

It still lacked a half hour of four, and the crowd broke up into little groups and wandered aimlessly about. Brice and Hazel strolled down a small hill to a great flat rock, where they sat down and surveyed the beautiful scenery which unfolded itself before them. Brice held her hat, and as his eyes wandered over the picture of sand and blue sky his fingers caressed the silken red petals of the poppy.

After a silence which had endured longer than either of them would have believed, Brice cleared his throat, nervously contemplated his fingernails for an instant and without looking in Hazel's direction said:

"I can't do it, Hazel. I can't keep back the words that are determined to come. I—— You must know that I—love you."

Hazel stared at him with wide eyes, and would have spoken, but he held up his hand and went on.

"You are so utterly devoid of conceit that it is barely possible that you have not discovered it, but if that is so then you are the only one who has not. Eleanor has even taken me to task for it, saying that you are too young, a mere child, and I have realized that what she said was true. Yet I have gone on caring more in spite of real efforts to see you in the light Eleanor endeavored to make me see you. You are not a child to me, but a woman with all the wonderfully sweet virtues a man wants in the woman he makes his wife and the mother of his children, and dear new virtues, little characteristics that are yours exclusively. I—please do not interrupt me, and won't you sit here beside me until I have finished?"

He turned his head, and his eyes looked into hers wistfully. She had made as if to rise, but at the look in his grave, kind face she sank back again to her former position at his side. Her heart ached for him, and although

this was her very first declaration of love from any man, there was not the least spark of triumph in the heart that had grown suddenly sad.

"Youth is the most easily remedied thing in the world," he continued, "and I am willing to wait, to wait indefinitely until the foolish, exacting world says that you are old enough to become one of her matrons.

"But I can't go on with the sham of being just 'your pal,' as you've called me. I want you to know that I love you. I want you to give me the right to teach you to care a little for me. I want the right to protect you, to watch over you. I want the right to love you with all the love I am capable of. And I want the right, dear—to—think of you as my future wife."

He ceased speaking abruptly, and looked pleadingly into her face without touching her. His hands were clasped tightly together, and although she was unconscious of that fact then, the thought of it came to her hours later, and with it came a new appreciation of the man.

Her lips trembled and tears welled up in the velvety eyes as she tried to speak. For a second no sound came from her mouth, and when her voice did come it was hardly more than a whisper.

"I *didn't* know, Brice. I *didn't* know. If I had, I'd have stayed away from you, I wouldn't have let you care like this. I—no one told me. If every one knew, why didn't some one tell me? Isn't it ethical? Would it have spoiled the game for them? Oh, Brice, Brice! What a shame that you should be made to suffer all because our friends have so many rules to follow! I'd have gone away, not just to another city or country, but away from everything that is a part of me here and have become some one else, and then you never would even have heard of me again and this thing would not have happened,—and whatever little—love—you had felt for me would have died. I—I am nothing but a waif, Brice. I have no right here amongst your friends, and

no one would have missed me much if I had disappeared long ago when you first began to—to—care.”

She reached out her hand and laid it gently, tenderly, on one of his, and the hot blood rushed to the tips of his fingers and back again to his brain with something in it that made him dizzy. Passing his free hand across his eyes, he tried to understand what she had been saying, and as the import of it made itself clear to him his shoulders involuntarily squared and he drew a deep breath as if bracing himself for the answer he knew she would make to his question:

“Do you think, then, that you could never care enough for me to marry me?”

“I am sorry, Brice, but I——”

“Yes, I understand, Hazel. But if ever you should”—he tried to smile hopefully—“change in your feeling for me, will you—will you let me know?”

“That would be contrary to the rules of convention, but I am not bound to observe those rules, and I therefore promise you, Brice, that if ever at any time I discover myself caring for you, as you would wish me, to come to you, no matter where you are, and—tell you.” She drew her hand away and shook a glistening tear from her long lashes. “We—we’d better not talk of it any more. It makes—us both—unhappy. Shall we return to the hotel?”

“You are an angel, Hazel. You call yourself a waif. You say that you have no right here amongst our friends. If you have not, then it is only because you are stooping too far down. There is not one of us who is worthy your smallest favor, and yet I am going to hope that, unworthy as I am, I will some day hear you say that you love me.”

He rose and, taking her two slim hands in his, lifted her to her feet. She placed one hand on his arm, and silently they made their way back to the hotel piazza, where the rest of the party had already gathered and where tea was being served on little square tables.

"Hello! Here are the truants," some one cried as Hazel and Brice came up.

A dozen pairs of inquisitive, curious eyes were instantly focused upon them, and the suspicious moisture on Hazel's long lashes did not escape many of them.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN tea was over bathing suits were brought from their various rooms and donned in the little bath houses that stood like sentinels along the beach.

When Hazel emerged from her bath house she was surprised to find Winifred Blaine standing near, fully dressed.

"Why, Mrs. Blaine, are you not going for a swim?"

"I do not swim." Hazel tried not to notice the brevity of the reply or that the woman did not look at her, and she laughed deprecatingly.

"Not many of us do, but we all go in the water just the same."

"So I observe."

At that moment Eleanor came up, and Hazel turned to her with a sigh of relief.

"You're pale, dear; are you ill?"

Eleanor shook her head and ran down the little hill, her short green skirt flapping about her limbs. In the direction from which she had just come Hazel discovered M. Louveau advancing slowly toward her, his thin, ungainly physique painfully exposed in a dark woolen bathing shirt and trunks.

François Louveau was to women a fascinating mystery, and to men he was but an open page of a vulgar book—disgustingly coarse in a silly, womanish manner—a social parasite, who owed money to any who would lend or accept his worthless I. O. U.'s—an effeminate bounder, who boasted blatantly of wealth and family, and who had neither, so far as any one knew.

"The more I see of you, the more charming I find you, Miss Hazel. You should never wear anything but a bathing suit," he drawled with insolent boldness.

An angry red spread over Hazel's face, and she wheeled swiftly and ran down the hill toward the group that had formed on the beach.

It took a good half hour's swim in the chill water to cool her burning cheeks, and at the end of it she found herself far up the beach on the other side of a little point which shut out the rest of the party from her view. She swam lazily along on her side, taking the long side stroke that she had loved when a child and the sea had been her most intimate friend, now and then thrusting her head under the surface and bringing out first one arm and then the other, her slim body sliding through the water with the ease and grace of a seal, with just the suggestion of the swishing tail in the scissor movement of the lower half of her limbs. Then she would turn on her back and lie, her slender bare arms stretched out at either side, gazing dreamily at the sky, apparently as comfortable as if resting on a soft silk-covered couch, her face glistening with water, her long lashes wet, and soft, shimmering dark curls clinging to her brow.

She was just beginning to think of returning to the bathers on the other side the point when something happened. There was a splash somewhere behind her, and an instant later a strangling scream.

In less time than it takes to relate it, Hazel was swimming, with the swiftness of a porpoise, in the direction from which the sounds had come. She had gone less than a hundred feet when she saw a woman's head come to the surface of the water and then slowly disappear.

Afterwards she remembered diving a couple of times unsuccessfully before her outstretched hand touched something that felt like a woman's dress. Through the water she saw dimly the outlines of a body.

It must have been no small task to get it ashore. She never remembered clearly about that, but when within a few feet of the small cliff, which made the water deep even at its very edge at this point, she saw the fright-

ened crowd running toward her round the point and heard their shouts, she remembered offering to her God a little prayer of thanksgiving.

Several of the men had jumped into the water and were swimming in her direction. It was Jim Atherton who reached her first, just as she was sinking from exhaustion a half dozen feet from shore.

He called to Brice Mathews, who was close behind him, to take care of the unconscious woman, and, loosening the rigid grip of Hazel's fingers where they still clutched a fold of the woman's dress, he picked her up in one arm and swam to the beach that made off below the little cliff. A shout went up from the men, and low cries came from the women.

"Keep them back!" he called to Billy Norton when the crowd started to close in around him as he laid the exhausted girl on the ground.

"Jim, Jim, is she all right?" Eleanor had pushed past Billy's restraining hand and was on her knees beside the still little figure on the sand.

"Yes. She's exhausted. That's all. Get some brandy, some one, and don't all stand like a lot of idiots doing nothing."

Both Eleanor and Jim Atherton had already forgotten the other woman,—the unconscious body this slender young girl had dragged ashore, until again they heard a scream. It did not sound like that of a human voice, but those who looked saw the Mummy bending over a prostrate form a few yards distant.

Carryl Langley came running with a silver flask, and a little of its contents was forced between Hazel's pale lips. Atherton leaned over and put his ear against her breast.

"Her heart is beating a little stronger. She'll be all right now."

Eleanor had lost all self-control. She sobbed softly as she caressed a long dark braid of wet hair.

A little color came slowly back into Hazel's cheeks,

and at last her eyes opened. There was a wondering, confused moment, and then she remembered.

"Is she all right?" she whispered.

"Yes."

Eleanor lifted the dark head into her arms. "You got her in in time, but you were exhausted. Now lie still a little while, dear."

At the first signs of returning strength Atherton had got to his feet and now stood a small distance away, his face turned from them.

Hazel lay quite still as Eleanor had told her, her head resting against the older woman's knee, her eyes moving restlessly about trying to see where they had taken the thing she had picked from that awful depth of swirling water. Suddenly she saw Brice Mathews leaning wearily against a tree, his anxious eyes turned toward her. Weakly she lifted one cold, tired little hand and beckoned to him. In a moment he was beside her, and without a word she slipped the hand into one of his and closed her eyes with a sigh. It was thus that Jim Atherton saw them when he turned his head. Smiling a little bitterly, he made his way down the beach to the bath houses.

An hour later after Hazel had rested and dressed, she emerged from her bath house to find the same woman near who had been there before; only this time she lay on an automobile rug instead of standing, her body wrapped in warm woolen blankets.

"I told them I wanted to be alone when I thanked you, and that I would not let them take me back to the hotel until I had seen you. So they are all waiting down there on the beach."

She paused, and Hazel saw that what she was trying to say was costing her a great deal.

"You don't need to thank me, Mrs. Blaine. No thanks are necessary."

The woman moved her head wearily from side to side and looked curiously at the face above her.

"Yes, but they *are* necessary. You saved my life, you know."

"But you don't seem to hold that at a very high value," Hazel ventured.

Winifred Blaine winced and moved her head restlessly.

"I owe my life to you. You are more or less responsible for it now. You know that in China it was once the custom to drown girl babies. Well, anybody pulling one from the water, and thereby saving it, was held responsible for that baby's future. You pulled me from the water, and I shall hold you responsible for mine."

Hazel wondered if she were not delirious, and glanced about her anxiously.

"Oh, I'm perfectly sane. I merely feel that you ought to know why I did what I did."

"Well, if it will make you rest any the easier, please proceed." There was a hint of impatience in Hazel's voice.

"It was Jim Atherton's fault."

"But you—you are a married woman."

Winifred Blaine laughed a hard little laugh.

"You are indeed the Innocent they call you!"

A feeling of nausea and disgust swept over the girl as an understanding of what the other meant came to her. She made a gesture of repulsion.

"I do not wish to hear any more. I will send your husband to you."

"Wait!" cried Winifred as Hazel made a movement as if to leave her. "I want you to thoroughly understand that Jim Atherton is to blame for my wretched condition."

"And supposing we were,—what would that have to do with me?" Hazel shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"Nothing, I hope. But there is a possibility that it might."

"I should be obliged to you if you would explain, please." The girl's black eyes were growing stormy, and one small foot was patting the ground ominously.

"It is simple enough. Jim Atherton is in love with you or will try to make you think that he is, and if you should ever marry him, I—I—well, I have told you that I shall hold you responsible for the life that I didn't want and which you saved."

Without looking at the woman, who lay on the ground at her feet, bearing in her washed out, tangled, straight-haired appearance, small resemblance to the carmine-lipped, pink-cheeked, waving-haired Winifred Blaine, whom every one knew, Hazel said in the coldest tone she had ever used to a living thing:

"You have nothing to fear from me in that direction, even if what you say were true, which I do not believe." At the last word she turned her back to the woman on the ground and walked rapidly down the hill.

"I fell into the sea. Remember, I fell in." The woman called after her, and Hazel's only answer was a curt nod without turning her head.

Everybody was inclined to fall down and worship her, and the things they began saying to her sickened her. What had she done? Saved a woman from drowning? Bah, it nauseated her. The thing she had saved had been better unsaved. She had done nothing but bring back to earth a physical thing void of soul. She had a mad desire to run to the water's edge and wash her hands, also her ears. When she could stand being called a heroine no longer she made an excuse that she had left something in her bath house, and slipped eagerly away from the effusive crowd.

She tried to get past the woman who still lay on the rug at the top of the hill, conversing now with several of the party who, with the Mummy, had come up to her, but the restless eyes of the woman saw her. She spoke to the Mummy, and immediately he was beside her, holding one of her hands in both his own clammy ones

and with tears in his bleary, faded eyes was saying in a maudlin voice:

"I won't even try to thank you for saving my darling's life. Words at best are such inexpressive things. But I want you to know that I shall never consider myself out of your debt."

He pressed two cold, moist lips to her hand, and Hazel thought that a snake must feel as cold and moist.

Words are indeed cold and inexpressive things, even at best, but once safely inside her bath house, Hazel gave vent to some French words, which were alarmingly expressive and for which she immediately and contritely prayed, in English, for pardon. She did not venture out again until she had heard them carrying Winifred Blaine toward the hotel, and by the receding voices of her friends she knew they were following. Cautiously she peered from her door, then stepped quietly out.

She had gone but a step when some one spoke her name. Glancing round, she saw Jim Atherton at her left staring at her strangely.

"You called me?" she asked courteously, but with poorly concealed eagerness to be gone.

He advanced a few steps, and when he was near enough that he could have touched her he stopped.

"I want to ask you something, Hazel."

"Dear me!" thought the girl. "Am I to be the arbitrator of all my quarreling friends?" Aloud she said:

"Do not waste time in coming at once to the point, *je vous prie*. It is late, and I must dress for dinner."

"It is of Brice that I wish to speak. Are you in love with him, Hazel?"

The girl stared at him in astonishment.

"What right have you to ask me such a thing?"

"Because I know here," he touched his breast, "that you will some day belong to me. Because you are the counterpart of a little girl whom I inherited and whom I lost,—I feel that I have a right to know if you care for Brice Mathews."

His voice was quite calm and steady, but a dull flush was on either cheek and his fine blue eyes were unusually bright.

Hazel's lips curled scornfully, although her heart beat high and her hands grew cold.

"Mr. Atherton has had too much absinthe again, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Without answer, he snatched her up in his arms and pressed his hot lips to her eyes, her hair, her mouth.

"I love you," he whispered between times; "I love you, I love you. You can never get entirely away from me, because you are mine,—mine in the eyes of the law, mine in the eyes of God, mine in your own heart and in mine. Go now, but do not forget that you are MINE." And as suddenly as he had caught her up he released her and pushed her gently from him.

Blindly the girl stumbled down the worn trail to the hotel. Her world had toppled into ruins at her feet. Her head ached with the passionate fury that possessed her. She was screaming mentally, writhing under a madness which made her want to kill. How she hated him! Every time she screamed that to herself something way down inside of her laughed in derision and cried mockingly:

"But his kisses, they burned into your very soul!"

"But I hate him, I hate him!" and she beat with clenched fists upon her breast and against her temples.

"Then tell me why you did not make the smallest struggle to release yourself when he held you in his arms?" mocked that something.

"I did! I did!"

"You lie!" mocked the thing from inside.

"Brice, Brice!" she cried when they sat together on the piazza that night, "either I have gone utterly mad to-day or all the rest of you have." And Brice Mathews patted her hand where it lay inert in her lap and sighed sadly.

It was a very gay little girl, bubbling over with youth and happiness, that had left Eleanor Rollins' apartment that morning. It was a weary, nauseated, wondering woman who lay on Hazel Willis' bed in a hotel room that night, clenching her hands and shuddering as the events of the day stalked continuously before her and refused mercilessly to leave her alone.

Her eyes were dry and hot. Her head ached frightfully, and although she closed her eyes and threw one cool, slender arm across them, they still saw the wretched parade of events. There were Eleanor and Allen,—Eleanor smiling across an unopened letter from her brother, asking indifferently about her I. O. U. and laughing when told that the money had arrived! And Allen, whose face she could visualize as he scrawled that dear letter which said, 'Be careful of your voice; you know *I've accepted that mortgage!*' Then came Brice, dear, old, good-natured Brice, with his kind brown eyes that seemed to be begging for mercy. If only they would not haunt her so! After him,—that awful François Louveau! Hideous little rat! Her cheeks burned each time the vision of him passed in the dark. Always his eyes looked up and down her body appraisingly. Always he inspired her with a desire to kill. Next there was Winifred Blaine. She had always shrunk from this woman for some reason; one which she had never tried to analyze. Yet—she had dragged her back to life only to hear that the thing she had saved was hardly worth the saving. And the Mummy! She had neither liked nor disliked him before, but now there in the dark of her room as he kissed her clenched hands again with his clammy lips a wave of pity for him passed through her.

The last figure in her phantom parade was Jim Ather-ton, and as he came toward her through the darkness her heart pounded, her hands grew cold and with a little cry of defiance she lifted her head and opened her eyes. But he had slipped through the open window like the rest, and was gone.

A faint sound of the surf came up to her from the beach, and after a time it began to soothe her. She lay quite still and listened. There was surely no music so beautiful. At last when the phantom parade had vanished into the night, another vision came to her. She saw an old farmhouse, with dry, curling paint, a yellow cornfield whose dry blades rattled with the slightest breeze. She saw a long, low porch with a faded hammock, a barelegged girl and shaggy mongrel dog. There were angry tears in the girl's eyes as she gazed at a forlorn, blossomless rosebush, and—stretching out before it all was the sea, her sea!

The following morning when Eleanor was making a rather late and hurried toilet there came a gentle rap on her door. In answer to her bidding a servant of the hotel entered and, bowing, extended a tray to her, on which lay a note.

When she was alone again, Eleanor broke the seal, and with a frown that sat strangely on her smooth white forehead read a few hastily written lines from Hazel. They said simply that she was taking the earliest and quickest transportation (she did not know yet what that would be) back to Paris. She was sorry, but she could not stay. She seemed to infect everybody with trouble and warfare, and, as she hated being responsible for either, she was going to remove the cause, herself, and they could all be fumigated or whatever is the correct thing to have done when one has been exposed to a plague, and she, Hazel, would advise them all to be vaccinated immediately.

"Now I wonder what on earth all that can mean? I wonder if——"

A few possible reasons flitted through the beautiful golden head, and then with a shrug Eleanor dismissed the whole thing and finished her toilet with stumbling, inexperienced fingers.

About the time that Eleanor had begun to explain the absence of her protégée to the flatteringly interested

group on the veranda, the girl of whom she was talking was seating herself at a tiny desk in her own room in the box of an apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann. The sun streamed in through an open window, and from below came the buzz and honk of the automobiles hurrying by. A straw hat with a dust-covered poppy lay on the bed beside an open traveling bag.

For a little while the girl sat, gazing off into space. Then with a sigh she began to write:

"DEAR BIG MAN:

"I wish I had written that in capitals to sort of emphasize it. You are so much Bigger than any one else and you keep on getting Bigger all the time, and every one else keeps getting smaller. Even Things are not Big any more like they used to be. Everything has gotten smaller. When I was a very little girl everything was Big. The ocean was endless. There was no shore but my shore. The trees were a mile high. The county where I lived was the new world Columbus had discovered. My mother's house, being the largest house in that immediate vicinity, was the largest house on earth. Men were all Big, and a man who happened to be a little taller than the rest was a giant. Even the horses were gigantic things, and now nothing is Big any more but You. Everything has dwindled until people and things alike are just pygmies. Oh, please, dear, dear Big man, don't ever dwindle. Some way I couldn't endure having you dwindle.

"I wonder if, after all, everything is as it always was. Do you suppose it is possible that I have simply lost my sense of proportion? If that is true then I sincerely hope to find it soon again, for you've no idea how dreadful it is to be living in such a rapidly diminishing world. Why, I'm actually afraid of falling off the wretched sphere every time I go out of doors. It is such an unsatisfactory place, and I would not mind falling off of it if there were anything to land on. But Space is

not a very promising thing even to a professional tumbler.

"I'm alone,—that is, Eleanor is away,—and the cook has promised to let me 'mess up the kitchen.' I'm going to make crullers. Burns used to make them, and she showed me how. Did you ever eat any crullers? But of course you never have,—not the real old-fashioned kind that melt in your mouth. Wait until I get back. I'll send that French chef of yours out to be cleaned and pressed and then I'll make you some crullers. Then we'll pack them away in a hamper, get into the car, go off into the country and play hookey.

"I am glad Burns went back to her family and Scotland. I can write to her now without being afraid of her advertising my whereabouts. I've written her several times and have had such happy, glad replies. Poor old Burns!

"I don't think that I'll ever care a great deal for any man—in the marrying kind of way—but I'll never be an old maid. Burns' winding up at the home of a brother, where she must be dreadfully in the way, is a lesson for me. I have no brothers or sisters, and therefore I'll have to marry. Children or grandchildren would have to take care of me, wouldn't they? That's compulsory, isn't it?

"There goes the cuckoo clock. It is noon and I'm hungry. Hope the pantry and its contents haven't *dwindled*.

Yours,

"JEAN.

"P. S. I've a stunning new gown, made it myself. Eleanor doesn't know that, though. She would not let me wear it if she knew. Women are terribly inconsistent, aren't they? They must hide an ability to do anything useful as they would an ugly scar. Eleanor likes my gown because she thinks it came from her modiste and therefore cost a great deal of money. I don't like deceiving her, but since I am making you my confessor it is not so bad, is it? It is shell-pink silk with

—do you know what tucks are?—tucks, very fine ones, forming the only trimming. J.

“P. S. II. This being some one that you are not is awful,—hideously awful! If it were not for my letters to you to which I can sign myself ‘Jean,’ and those from you addressing me as Jean, I’d forget all about the pig-tailed girl who used to hide toads under the minister’s pulpit and whose only companions were a little tin sprinkler and a mongrel dog!”

CHAPTER X

ELEANOR ROLLINS returned from Deuville determined to take Hazel to task for her sudden and unexplained disappearance from the seashore. She entered the little apartment with a half-grown frown corrugating her white brow, and the first thing to greet her eyes was a worn, faded green sweater—a relic of Jean's tin sprinkler days and one which her protégée loved to don when in certain moods and which she had stubbornly refused to eliminate from her new wardrobe—making a mess of the color scheme of the pompous little drawing-room. It lay—a smudge of faded, variegated greens, with flamboyant streaks of orange where the sun had caressed it too warmly—on the soft old-rose brocaded satin of a gilded chair. A toy donkey, fresh from the touch of a now vanished hand, stood on an almost priceless silken rug before the gilded chair and nodded his head and wagged his ears with monotonous solemnity. Hazel had picked it up in a toy shop one day because she declared it reminded her of civilization, which she said, “nods her head and wags her ears while she is making up her mind just where she will kick you.”

Even one with a less keen sense of humor and who is less a victim to his emotions than Eleanor Rollins must have laughed at the grotesque picture framed by the delicately tinted walls of that drawing-room. Eleanor shrieked—if that is what one might be permitted to call the thing ladies do when they laugh very loudly, real unsociety-like laughter, the thing in which they seldom indulge except in the privacy of their own boudoirs and at a time when a brass band happens to be honoring the neighborhood with its presence. The faded green sweater was calling the old-rose chair ugly and insulting names, and the gilded chair, too aristocratic and digni-

fied to reply in like language, looked appealingly at Eleanor and flushed a shade rosier.

Eleanor leaned against the door frame and dabbed at her eyes with a ridiculously small lace handkerchief. Behind her stood the immobile, red-faced butler, a trifle more red and a little less immobile than usual.

"It—it looks like a—a futurist picture or—or a cubist, which ever one it is that puts colors to—together like that."

Eleanor's voice was a bit choky and uncertain. The butler, who was not supposed to have a sense of humor or anything else except a knowledge of how to buttle, covered the rapidly disappearing immobility of his face with his hand and coughed politely.

The donkey nodded more slowly, and his ears had almost ceased wagging. Eleanor thrust out one daintily shod foot and touched the solemn gray nose with the tip of her toe. Immediately the head and ears gained speed. Then with another shriek that came near to ending in a sob, she stooped and gathered the silly little donkey and the faded green sweater into her arms and, pressing a soft cheek against them, fled to her room, leaving the butler to announce her return home to the household.

Always since Hazel's advent to Paris, M. Dupont's studio, unpretentious almost to shabbiness, had been her home, and the luxurious little apartment on the fashionable Boulevard Haussmann or the quarters which had preceded it had been but the place where she lived.

M. Dupont's studio was famous as M. Dupont himself. It had been at the beginning of his career as an instructor of vocal music and still was a great barn-like room on the top floor of an old house on a smelly side street. The rest of the building like those which surrounded it was tenanted by Italians and other aliens, and always the mixed odors of spaghetti and garlic came up to the small square windows which peeped from under the eaves and tried vainly to force their way beyond the


fortification of fragrant red geraniums which lined the windowsills and which were flanked by carved sandal-wood screens.

The stairs leading up three flights to that barn-like room under the roof were neither clean nor promising. They never promised a descent to one who ascended or an ascent to one who descended. One never felt quite sure indeed that the immediate ascent or descent would be accomplished without disaster. They wobbled and groaned like a drunken man with rheumatism. They were hollowed from the climbing of many feet, some of which had already gone back to dust at the time when M. Dupont first touched his young, ambitious ones to the concave steps. The nails, even then, had lost their heads, like many of the people who had climbed over them had done, and had been worn half away with Time and the hollowing of the wood. But they were wonderfully bright,—several generations of rolling stones had given to them a silvery polish.

M. Dupont had come to this house soon after the death of his mother. She had been a great singer who had earned and spent with lavish, generous hands several fortunes. He had brought with him his sole inheritance,—three carved sandal-wood screens which years before had been presented to his talented mother by the Czar of all the Russias in gracious acknowledgment of her wonderful voice.

At first it had been very hard. The hungry wolf had climbed the three flights of concave steps many times in those days. He had frequently heard its menacing sniff outside his door, and once when his little cooking pots and pans had not been warm for days he had awakened in the night to see it grinning at him from the foot of his bed. Its teeth had gleamed very white in the moonlight which streamed in through the window, and its eyes had been very red.

Only a few of those desiring to have their voices trained found their way to the studio under the roof of



the ramshackle old house on that smelly side street,—a pathetically money-lacking few. That was at first. Then came the day when Mademoiselle Moreau had startled the world,—at least that part of it which is music-loving—with her wonderful voice. She made her début as a singer in “Carmen,” and before the second curtain had gone down her listeners were saying to each other:

“Who could have been her teacher?”

That night when Mademoiselle Moreau was being deluged with flowers and questions, she gave to the world which had never heard of him before—M. Dupont, and the music-loving world had bent its knee and bared its head.

Then had come Success. It had come running up the rickety old steps, and without pausing to knock had burst in the old door. It had slaughtered the wolf which had crouched there. It had taken M. Dupont in its arms and coddled and petted him while it emptied its horn of plenty over his head. It had continued smiling on the dark-eyed little man, and, like a wireless instrument, he sent from his door waves of Success. He became famous in a night. Carriages (and automobiles,—after they came) stood daily before the door with the rusted squeaky hinges which bore the simple sign, “M. Dupont, Vocal Instructor.” And there were those who came neither in a carriage nor in any other conveyance and whose shoes were conspicuously patched. But they rode away again on one of those waves of Success to return some day to M. Dupont with words of deepest gratitude to the little man who had sent them out so well equipped, a fact to which the great scented cars which waited for them outside the rickety door bore silent testimony.

Always there had been a little wonder that M. Dupont remained a tenant of the great barn-like room on that impossible street, but no one had ever asked him why. There was that about the little man, a gentle reserve, a quiet dignity, which forbade intimacy or discussions of things personal. He neither asked questions nor encour-

aged them. So it was that those who knew him pretended that he was "bohemian" and that he stayed on in the old studio because of its "Latin atmosphere." Thus the studio itself began to share its tenant's fame.

When M. Dupont had first put up his carved sandalwood screens to hide the scarred ugly walls and had planted the red geraniums in the narrow window boxes, his pockets had been empty and his heart full. But since that day his pockets had grown full and his heart empty. His illusions, those that had come to that big room with him, were gone. In their place was a sweet philosophy and a keen understanding of life in all its intricacies. He had never married, and no one had ever wondered about it. M. Dupont was M. Dupont. That was all there was to it. At sixty he had retired with a generous sum credited to him at his bank, a few bonds hidden away in a deposit vault, the title and deed to the building wherein he resided and a few lines—you, not knowing him, would call them wrinkles—which cut deep into the soft ivory skin of his face and emphasized the white of his hair.

For more than two years M. Dupont had watered his geraniums, read Victor Hugo and gone to the opera, always alone, always gently ignoring the advances of the social lion-hunters, always simply M. Dupont,—no more and no less. Then had come a letter from a man for whom the little white-haired man had the tenderest regard. Indeed in all the world there was no one to whom he felt so closely drawn, despite the fact that he had never seen him. When he was still a boy in his early teens he had gone to America with his singing mother, and there one day behind the scenes he had met the daughter of the man who owned and managed the opera house in which his mother was then singing. She had stood in the wings with her governess—she was only fifteen he had afterwards learned—listening with a rapt, upturned face to his mother's voice, and he, an almost grown French lad, had thought her an angel. When the curtain had gone down with the heroine—his mother—

dying from the knife wound of an outraged lover, the girl was sobbing and some way—he could never remember how—he had her little hand in his and was explaining that, after all, it was only a play. She had smiled up at him with wide, moist eyes, and to his surprised delight had answered him in French. Shyly he had retained her hand until he had led her to his mother's dressing-room, where, without knowing who she was or where she came from, he had placed her slim little hand in a jeweled one of his mother's and had said :

"She is the most beautiful being in all the world, mother, and I want to know if she will marry me when we are old enough. Will you ask her, mother?"

If laughing wonder had crinkled for a second the singing mother's eyes, the boy standing awkwardly before her never knew it. Smilingly, indulgently, she had looked into the girl's wide gray eyes and asked the question. The girl's cheeks had grown a warmer pink, but her eyes had sought those of the boy, and she had smiled a shy, quivery smile and said "yes."

For weeks,—two, three, four, five, after that wonderful first day when their troth was plighted, they had met daily behind the scenes. Sometimes they sat on a dust-covered seat near the somber brick wall, against which was stacked odd pieces of scenery and stage property, and whispered little confidences to each other. Sometimes they stood in one of the wings and laughed together at the little comedies or wept together when the play called for tears,—the girl weeping openly, the boy with suppressed sobs and brave attempts to smile.

The company, even the mother of the boy and father of the girl, had smiled indulgently at first. But the continuance of the affair, and the insistence of the youthful pair that they be taken seriously, had resulted in the girl being sent off to boarding school and the boy back to a college in France. They had corresponded. Their letters had passed each other at sea every week for two years, and then they had met again.

He was in New York once more with his mother, and for one brief hour they had sat alone in Central Park. At the end of that never-to-be-forgotten hour a carriage had stopped before them and the angry face of the girl's mother was looking out at them. He never saw the girl again. She was sent away—he knew not where, and she did not write. But the boy never lost faith. He returned to his native land to await the mature years that would soon be his. His mother died the following year.

Two days after his few belongings had been installed in the room in the smelly street, the girl had written that she was to be married within the week to Ralph Hamilton, the man who, she went on to say, had succeeded her father as manager and owner of the Cosmopolitan Opera House. Her father, she wrote, had died eight months before, leaving as his dying wish a request that she marry Ralph Hamilton.

M. Dupont watered his geraniums and fought daily battles with the wolf for several years. On the day on which the world heard first of M. Dupont, the little man so named read of the death of "Mrs. Ralph Hamilton, the well-known philanthropist," in the columns of a New York newspaper to which he always had been a subscriber even in those darkest days when his little pots and pans were coldest. Two children and a husband survived her, the paper went on to state,—a boy named Allen and a girl called Eleanor. So the very day on which his pockets had begun to fill M. Dupont's heart had gone empty. The years had come and gone with their little triumphs and their petty cares and nothing unusual—nothing that was not a part of the daily monotony of the little man's life—ever came up the three flights of worn, uncertain stairs until that day on which Allen Hamilton's letter arrived.

There was nothing unusual in that letter, either, for that matter. But the name that was in one corner of the envelope leaped at the old professor's heart like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky. Allen Hamilton,—man-

ager and owner of the Cosmopolitan Opera House, as well as a great string of theatres which stretched all the way across the United States,—that was the information one got from the letterhead,—knew, of course, as did every one else, that M. Dupont was the greatest vocal instructor of the age. He knew also that M. Dupont was no longer receiving pupils, so it was with a great deal of doubt and anxiety that he, Allen Hamilton, asked M. Dupont to take as a pupil a young girl who happened to be the writer's protégée. She had nothing in her voice that would indicate possibilities even, but perhaps M. Dupont could develop *something*, and whether or not M. Dupont thought it possible even to do that, would he not consent to take this pupil for reasons which the writer would later explain?

All night long after the day on which it had been received, M. Dupont sat before an open window gazing out into the darkness and fingering Allen Hamilton's letter. It was typewritten, but the hand of Her son had signed it. Out of all the world Her son had chosen him when his need arose. Like a homing pigeon, Her son had come to him. Would he help him? Would he? Ah, what was there which he would not do for a child of Hers!

The next day he had written to say that he would be very glad to—"accommodate" was the word he wrote, but he promptly blotted it out and wrote instead the words "have the pleasure" of training the young lady's voice. When the letter was posted he tramped about restlessly for an hour. Then, seeking the nearest cable office, he wired:

"Happy to be of service to you."

Two weeks later Allen Hamilton's protégée climbed the rickety stairs and entered the studio of the little white-haired professor, and there began a new life for M. Dupont, whose gentle old heart grew full once more.

In return for that which she gave to M. Dupont and

his studio, the little old man and his barn-like studio gave to Hazel a sense of security at those times when she felt the ground slipping from under her feet. When her earth rocked and threatened to spill her off into space or smear her with soot from the end of a perfectly conventional stick, she ran to the ramshackle house on the smelly side street. There she "slid off the crest of a volcano"—to use her own naïve expression—and got her feet once more on "solid, honest and reliable terra firma."

M. Dupont planted the seeds of his own sweet philosophy in her fertile young heart, and when they had begun to sprout he tended them with the same tender care and patient perseverance with which he tended his geraniums.

The great room so grotesquely furnished with its shabby, threadbare rugs spread audaciously beside gorgeous oriental ones; its few good pictures and its worn books with their yellow pages brought back to Hazel visions of her old home where worn, shabby things vied with the few gems of art which her mother had managed to save from the wreck of her fortune. Always the old man and his old room soothed her. Thus it was that on the day on which Eleanor arrived home Hazel had gone to M. Dupont's.

She found him watering his beloved geraniums and scolding some sparrows which were quarreling and fighting on the window ledge where a few minutes before he had thrown a handful of bread crumbs. His quick ear caught the clatter of a pair of eager feet on the creaking old stairs. M. Dupont set down his rubber sprinkler hastily and turned a face filled with glad expectancy toward the door.

"No, Madam, I shall not disturb you on my trip down. I am sorry that I must always disturb all the tenants when I go to M. Dupont's studio, but I have no faith in those stairs; they're always threatening. I like to get off them as soon as possible, once I've started up them. I

assure you, Madam, that I will not disturb you on my trip down. I descend by way of the banisters; it is the quicker way, and I feel that I have a chance of honest dealings with the banisters."

The eager feet had paused at the top landing, and their owner was answering an accusation from some one on the floor below. A delighted smile spread over M. Dupont's face, and he chuckled happily. The door burst open, and Hazel came into the room blowing a kiss from her fingertips to the white-haired old man at the window.

"Ah, Monsieur, the duchess on the floor below complains that 'de girl witha de noisa de feet meka sucha de rack lika de tona de brick.'"

The little French professor's enjoyment of Hazel's mimicries never lessened. On the contrary, it grew more keen with the passing of time. At the very beginning this fatherless girl had flung wide the portals of his heart and, planting herself in the very center of it, had banged the portals shut behind her. Now as the little man looked at the fresh young face that crinkled its eyes saucily at him, he knew that his heart was full. One hears a great deal about the mother instinct and little if anything about the father instinct. This white-haired old man was alive with father instinct. Alone all his life, he had been lonely without knowing it. He had needed some one upon whom he might lavish his great store of tenderness, and he had never recognized the need.

"But I thought you had gone to ze seashore, Made-moiselle!"

"So I did, Monsieur, but you did not wish me to stay there, did you?"

"Ah, but no. Eet eez not zat, no, no! You only say zat so you have eet one excuse to pout *n'est ce pas?*"

The girl's pouting lips dimpled at the corners, and she laughed merrily. The old man laughed, too, and the walls that had been so many years without revelry re-

sounded it. Suddenly Hazel's eyes narrowed, and abruptly her laughter ceased.

"I returned because—because, Monsieur, I—— Oh, it is useless for me to try to dissemble. I can't. I am not yet sufficiently civilized. I did not enjoy the seashore, Monsieur, or rather, I did not enjoy the people who visited it."

M. Dupont came slowly across the room. Silently he took possession of the girl's gloved hands, and silently he looked into the girl's dark eyes. What he saw there was rebellion, a battle as great in its way as the one fought in her own country at Bunker Hill; a war, from which little sword points flashed out at him. Without breaking the silence he led Hazel to a seat, and with a characteristic gesture indicated that she should remove her hat and gloves. Obediently she did so, but the little vicious yank at a stubborn button on one of the gloves did not escape the keen eyes of the little old man who stood before her. His narrow, stooped old shoulders squared for an instant, and the pupils of his eyes dilated.

"Some one," he said, at last, lapsing into his rapid French, "some one has hurt you; is it not so? But no. It is not necessary that you answer. All that I would know is his name."

"You misunderstand, my dear good friend. It is not that I am hurt by any one thing or any one person—it is simply that I do not understand this new world. Its rules are not only strange to me, but I can't make four out of two and two with them. My world—a simple, antiquated old world—had such simplified methods that even fractions were not bewildering. A divorce, for example, was a divorce, and there was no way that you could work the problem so that it took a wife away from a man and left her his check book or made the children call two or more men 'father.' There were no rules by which a woman could subtract a fiancé or two, plus a husband and have left a lot of sweethearts politely called 'friends.' There were no rules that made it correct for

married men to flirt with single girls or single men with married women."

Hazel leaned her dusky head against the cushioned back of the chair, and much of the mutiny in her shown out through her soul's brilliant windows. "I suppose I'll have to get used to this new set of rules since those of *my* world—the world which had for its boundaries a Methodist church, a sainted mother, a preaching ocean and a mongrel dog—are obsolete."

M. Dupont had listened first with relief and then with pain. When the girl ceased speaking he smiled down at her and shook his head sadly the while he wondered how he could ever hope to confute all that she had said about this new world upon whose threshold she stood.

"Perhaps you have taken for granted that the rules of the few are the rules of the many."

Hazel smiled up at him skeptically.

"They seem to be standard rules. There seems to be but one code. Ah, cher ami, you are going to try to convince me that I am wrong. But you have played their game so little yourself that you, too, are a novice at dissimulation. You and my dear good benefactor across the sea are the two old world rules that I have been permitted to keep, and if you begin telling me that two and two make five I shall pull your hair."

The old man flushed guiltily.

"But you are so young, my child, to be cynical. You must not judge all the world by the few with whom you have come in contact. The Golden Rule is, after all, the one big rule."

"I concede that there *is* such a rule and that it is the one big one. But, monsieur, monsieur, how many people have you known who worked all their problems by it? They talk about it. They have it printed on bits of cardboard that they may hang it on their walls. They say it in prayers before they outgrow the habit of praying, and even then they teach it to their children. You yourself once told me that you had known many men and women

anxious to study some one of the arts who, lacking the necessary funds, have been lifted onto the ladder and boosted along to the top by some one who happened to be more plentifully supplied with this world's goods and that in not one instance had the artist ever given evidence of gratitude,—that in most cases success had raised him to a social stratum a little above and beyond that occupied by his erstwhile benefactor, and that from that height either he looked down at his benefactor or forgot him entirely."

For an instant M. Dupont's face clouded. The finely drawn lines deepened. Then of a sudden it cleared, and triumphantly he smiled back at the little cynic.

"That is all very true, my dear. Those selfish young egoists *have* outgrown the Golden Rule, but,—what of the benefactors?"

Hazel's eyes widened and her red lips parted, but it was more than a minute before she replied.

"You wonderful old dear! In spite of myself I am convinced. How could I believe that the one big rule was obsolete and no longer practiced so long as there remained in the world such beings as you and Allen Hamilton. I am an egoist of the worst type. I am always so—is '*infernally*' swearing, monsieur? Yes? Well, then—I am always so—so *disgustingly* sure that I am right and that everybody else is wrong."

"You malign yourself, Mademoiselle. You are an angel!"

"If I am, then it is of the Darius Green variety, for always when I think I am nearest to flying I fall down with a crash. Really, I felt almost exalted to-day when I came here. I meant to sit on my pedestal and point out to you just how rotten the world is. Now, with one sweep of your reasoning you have knocked me off, and I'm afraid it will take all the king's horses and all the king's men to put my egoism together again."

There came a whimsical upward turn to her red lips, and the old man was happy once more.

"At least nobody can consistently accuse you of lacking gratitude. Mr. Hamilton will reap as well as sow."

"Oh, that is what has worried me ever since you told me of—of those other artists. I am afraid there never will come to my hand the kind of coin that will repay him. I will want to repay with interest what he has sown. I am not referring to dollars and cents, but to the Big Rule, to generosity and kindness of heart—I will want to repay, but will ever there be a way?"

"Perhaps. Who knows? You may have an opportunity of doing him a great service some day. You know it was a mouse that liberated the lion which was caught in a net."

The girl clasped her hands with the intensity of her emotion.

"Ah, if only I have the chance! There is no sacrifice which I would not make for him, monsieur. I would lay down my life gladly if the snuffing out of my candle would make his burn the brighter."

CHAPTER XI

THE Billy Nortons were returning to America in a fortnight, and everybody was wining and dining them because everybody liked the Billy Nortons.

Mrs. Billy was a petite blonde of the "blondest kind," to use Billy's words. She had merry blue eyes, which laughed with the world and at it. She was quick of wit, yet childlike in her unalloyed faith in all the world and her lack of that world's knowledge. Women loved her. Men adored her, and as for Billy—he worshiped her.

Billy was tall and straight—physically and morally. He was very, very rich. Men loved him. Women adored him, and Mrs. Billy—bullied him.

Billy always breakfasted in Mrs. Billy's boudoir, where Mrs. Billy in a wickedly pretty dressing gown and a coquettish lace cap curled up in a huge chair and smiled at Billy between yawns and sips of steaming coffee. It was at breakfast that Billy loved her best. He hated the things which held in the soft little figure, and made it sit stiff and straight on the edge of a chair. He hated the numerous hairpins which confined the mass of sun-kissed hair into a conventionally prim coiffure. He even hated the mature hours of the day which compelled him to share her with others.

One morning, just a week before the day on which they were to sail, they sat, as usual, in Mrs. Billy's boudoir at breakfast discussing the season to come. Eleanor Rollins was announced, and Eleanor herself came into the room on the heels of the announcement.

"Eleanor! Such an early bird!" Mrs. Billy set down her cup with a smile of pleased surprise.

"I *am* rather early," glancing apologetically at the

game as it was played by those members. Billy could guess some of the things which Hazel had said to the older woman, and he smiled in quiet enjoyment.

When Eleanor was gone Eve sat down behind the percolator once more and puckered her forehead at Billy. Billy chuckled.

"I don't see anything funny about it," Eve reproached him.

"There isn't really. Especially for the Duc de Gourman."

"Billy Norton, I do believe that you don't like Eleanor Rollins!"

"There are no reasons, are there, Eve, why I should *not* like her?"

"Why, of course not—unless you imagined them."

"You have always told me that I lacked imagination."

"Then why do you seem a little pleased about the new turn of affairs between Eleanor and the Duc de Gourman?"

"The Duc de Gourman is my friend. I have nothing at heart but a desire for his happiness."

"But what—— Oh, you *can* be so hatefully mystifying at times." Eve's small white teeth made a crescent in a crisp piece of toast, while her eyes shot little anger signals at Billy. Billy smilingly refused to see them. Then there ensued a series of curious questions from Eve and noncommittal shakes of the head from Billy, after which Eve poutingly ran out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Eve was not a gossip. On the other hand, she was a loyal little defender of the victims of gossip. But she had an overdeveloped bump of curiosity, and that bump kept her busy prying into things which did not really belong to the Billy Nortons. To Billy his wife's inordinate curiosity about the affairs of others was the fault of a child who wants to see what is in her doll's head and who is willing to break the doll to satisfy that desire. To him Eve was a beautiful child who was just a bit

spoiled. The bump in itself was harmless enough, but because Billy feared that it might grow into something malignant if allowed to grow at all, he tried to starve it—hoping that his wife's health of body and mind would eventually absorb it. He never allowed a word of gossip to reach Eve's ears if he could help it.

There had been gossip of an inoffensive kind,—that is, if gossip is ever inoffensive—about Eleanor Rollins and François Louveau. They had been seen together pretty often in the ladies' parlors of hotels—when *will* women learn that parlors of hotels are not safe trysting places?—talking earnestly and not at all like mere casual acquaintances, and Billy had heard these scraps of gossip at the club. Carryl Langley had poured most of it out suddenly one day, and Billy had heard it before he had had time to leave the room. Billy hated gossip, but some way he could not help being fond of Carryl Langley. For one thing, Langley never gossiped about women. All his ammunition was reserved for the men, and, as Langley rightly claimed, by making the affairs of all men public property the women were compelled to be a trifle more conventional or at least more circumspect.

The week that had begun with Eleanor's call was full of shopping and social functions for both Eleanor and Eve. There were so many things to buy, things—as Billy pointed out—which could be purchased in New York for less money minus the packing required and duty to be paid. But then—the New York things would not have sewed in them somewhere those valuable little pieces of ribbon in which the magic word "Paris" is woven. True, the somewhere is always in some secluded place where it can never be seen except by the owner or her maid. But the owner knows that it is there, and that scrap of ribbon with its magic word instils into her a wonderful confidence in herself and a dignity that sometimes approaches snobbishness. Billy declared that a certain woman he knew kept the canceled checks which had brought to her wardrobe gorgeous creations of silk

and lace, and pinned them to those same creations. She said that she felt more keenly her position in society when she saw a cancelled check for an outrageously large amount each time her maid dressed her,—that it sent her out of her boudoir with a feeling of security, and that those canceled checks hidden here and there upon her person gave to her a poise which would make it possible for her to hobnob with Royalty without feeling at all abashed!

Billy tagged along to most of the social affairs and to a few of the shopping ones. Hazel tagged along to most of the shopping affairs and to a few of the social ones. The day on the morning of which Eleanor had awakened Hazel to tell her of her sudden decision to go home had been a puzzled and wondering one for Hazel. With the sure instinct of a child of nature she knew that the Duc de Gourman loved Eleanor and that Eleanor was not altogether indifferent to the Duc de Gourman and try as she would she could not make four out of two and two.

The following day the Duc de Gourman received at his club a brief note, the chirography of which was boyishly angular. The tall good looking man stroked his stubby mustache absently and looked unseeingly out of the window at the passing throng when he had finished reading the little note, and a new hope was born in his eyes and something like reverence came and stood beside it whenever they wandered back for an instant to the sheet of note paper in his hand. The note said simply:

"My very dear Friend:

"I am not the confidante of any one and I do not wish to be but I feel that all is not well with you and with my dear benefactress and that feeling makes me very unhappy. Whatever way either of you play this game we call Life I know that neither of you are of the kind who cheat, and that sometimes when the chess board

looks the most complicated and the least promising the game is the simplest.

"I have heard that in India when a native meets with a disappointment he does not give up as we do. He waits,—just waits. It is not wise to throw up one's cards because one is discouraged with the game, when the very next card on the deck might be the ace one wants.

"It would not be fair for me to tell you why I feel that you should stay in the game but it would not be unfair to any one, would it, if I told you to WAIT?"

It was a model of diplomacy—that note. A diplomat could not have written one which said so much without saying anything. It handled a delicate subject which concerned no one vitally except the man and the woman, yet Hazel had conveyed to the man the message which she desired to convey without offending his æsthetic idea of the correctness of things.

After posting that note Hazel had gone to M. Dupont's studio, where, without so much as mentioning her new worry, she received a panacea for it and went away again once more the optimist.

When the day arrived on which the Billy Nortons and Eleanor were to sail Hazel awoke with that confused feeling of impending disaster. Tossing her loosened mass of dusky hair back from her face she raised herself on her elbow and for a second glanced wonderingly about her room. When the nature of her individual impending disaster became clear to her sleep-clouded brain she sprang from the bed and rushed with a convulsive heart to Eleanor's room, where she found that lady still in the arms of Morpheus.

"Eleanor, Eleanor, dear, to-day is the day on which you leave me. Wake up, dear. I want to look at you and talk with you. I want to get a lot of you in these last few hours, enough of you to last me until you come again—and you *will* come again, won't you, Eleanor?"

Eleanor's half opened eyes stared at Hazel as if she were but the continuation of a dream until the last part of Hazel's sentence reached her ears. Then immediately she was awake and alert. Come back again? Would she? Would she ever come to Paris again? Paris—gay, sad, frivolous and bad, the place to which all her friends migrated when things at home began to grow stale,—Paris, the gorgeous poppy field which had always intoxicated her, Paris, where the shops, the theatres, the restaurants and the gayeties of society all helped to make the deadly little pills which fools like herself smoked with the avidity of Chinamen in an opium den? Poor fools! They never paused to inquire whether there were penalties attached. Would she ever return? She did not know. She had gone first to that beautiful poppy field with illusions, with a soul, with faith in humanity. She was leaving it with only the corpse of her soul and with faith as scarred as the arm of one whose constant companion is a hypodermic needle. And behind her she was leaving the burying ground of her dead illusions.

She picked at the bed clothes nervously and moistened her dry lips with her tongue. Hazel was speaking and with an effort she listened.

"—I should like you to know that I love you, Eleanor, and that no matter what your troubles are I would gladly share them. Is there nothing—absolutely nothing that I can do to alleviate the thing which is weighing you down?"

Eleanor looked at her with startled eyes.

"Why do you think that I have any troubles?"

"I don't think it. I feel it. Also, I have a prescience of more troubles to come, and despite the fact that your years number more than mine, I feel that I could help you to steer clear of them if you would let me."

Eleanor reached out her hand and her eyes filled with tears.

"You wonderful little girl! You will never know

how much you have helped me. Don't ever think that I do not appreciate what you have done for me. I do! I do! But there is no way that you can help now except by forgetting that prescience, as you call it!" She drew down the young girl's head and kissed each dark starry eye.

"I—I would like you to promise me that—that——"

"That I will not play at cards? That I will not gamble?"

"Yes."

Eleanor bit her thin under lip and her eyes strayed away from those looking anxiously into her face.

"I promise you, little mentor. There—there will be less temptation over on the other side. And now I must up and hike, as they say back home. What shall I tell Allen for you?"

"Tell him," Hazel's face became beautifully tender, "that I am working hard to justify his faith in my voice. Tell him that whether or not it is ever great enough to sing that opera upon which his heart is set and which he says he is saving for me, I will not always be his debtor, that some day, some way, I will give him a harvest." The infinite tenderness that shone in the girl's ivory face made a picture in Eleanor's heart which she carried away with her and which she described to Allen Hamilton on her first day at home.

At noon Hazel returned to the apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann, after having seen her friends off, with a heavy heart and an oppressive sense of loneliness. A great many of the Billy Nortons' and Eleanor Rollins' circle had been at the Gare du Nord, and all had been equally anxious to know what plans Hazel had made as to her future abode. Hazel had evaded their questions so successfully that she was able to get away from them at last without leaving behind her any information that would make it possible for any of them to locate her after she had closed the luxurious little apartment and turned the key over to the agents.

She had been glad to see the Duc de Gourman arrive at the Gare du Nord just before the train departed with a great box of flowers for Eleanor and although Eleanor had buried her face in the fragrant blossoms when the cover had been removed, Hazel had seen the look that had come into the sapphire eyes and her heart had gone a degree heavier.

At the apartment while a maid packed her things she wrote to Allen.

"She has gone"—she wrote—"and I am just wondering if I will call in a doctor for the heart or the head. I understand there are specialists for both. My head is whirling like mad and my heart is dislocated and is pounding away somewhere in the region of my solar plexus.

"Isn't it funny how people permeate a place, fill it so full of themselves that the place becomes one with them? It becomes inoculated with the personality that has touched it.

"Every piece of furniture in this house is weeping with loneliness and the walls look horribly gloomy. I never before noticed that walls could express anything, but the wall in front of this desk has the look of a dyspeptic grave-digger. It makes me think of ghosts and I'm all a-shiver.

"I have had such a wonderfully happy time here with Eleanor since her return to Paris. Life has been a sort of merry-go-round with the funny little organ in the center playing constantly. But like all merry-go-rounds it went terribly fast and once in a while somebody let go the neck of his little wooden horse or gaily painted seat and fell off.

"There's an awful suction around a merry-go-round and if you don't hang on for dear life you are pretty apt to go whizzing off and to hit old mother earth with a thud. Gravity—the kind that draws bodies toward the center of the earth, not the kind which means serious-

ness or solemnity—is at her best on the edge of a merry-go-round.

“When I kissed Eleanor good-bye I let go, for just one second, my hold on the arched neck of my gallant little pony, and bang! I went down with such a thud that I think I almost got even with mother earth for drawing me in her direction. I’m all black and blue and I’m a little chagrined because the merry-go-round never stopped to see if I was hurt. But I should not have expected it to stop. It never stops for an unfortunate who loses his grip and falls off and the louder that unfortunate screams the louder plays the music on the merry-go-round!

“Oh, well, I’m a pretty swift runner and I can make a cat look like an ossified thing when it comes to climbing. So I’ll be back on my gay wooden pony in a little while. And I won’t look back nor down and I’ll shut my eyes if I get too dizzy.

“Is it true that the ‘individual mind is the generating principle of all human happiness?’ That the individual is like a silk worm which ‘weaves its universe out of its own being?’ That all the happiness we ever attain ‘lies within us from the beginning?’ That all truth is nothing more than ‘self-development?’ M. Dupont says this is so. Do you think that it is? (You don’t mind my irrelevance, do you?)

“I am going to move to-morrow into a room in M. Dupont’s neighborhood. An American family, which happens to have gotten to that locality by mistake or malice aforethought, has rented me its best room, for which I am to partially pay by helping the daughter to learn French. She is not very strong and as the work at which she is at present employed is heavy, her one ambition is to be able some day to get a position as saleslady in the Bon Marché.

“It will be nice to get away from all the rest of the riders on their painted wooden horses. You see, M. Dupont and I know that the merry-go-round horses

are wooden, but most people seem to think that they are real.

"I will not have to ride to and from M. Dupont's studio any more in those disgustingly crowded tram-cars. They have all the odors of a delicatessen shop and stop only in the sun, where they seem to be eternally doomed to stay, especially on a hot day. Everybody and their dogs drag themselves over you in order to get to a vacant seat where they can rest half an hour or more while the car runs to the other end of the block. The other day a very fat, very foreign woman (who, obviously, had been to market) sat down beside me, and edge off as much as I could her basket of fish—they buy them alive from the fish markets, where they keep them in huge tanks—rested against one of my knees. Suddenly the car turned a corner. The basket tilted a bit and one of the fish slid out of it and went wriggling through my music roll! I left the car and walked the rest of the way to the studio through an atmosphere that was stifling from the heat—and other things.

"Big Chief, would you be so very disappointed if my voice did not turn out to be great, after all? I study so hard and I practice twice as much as M. Dupont says is necessary, but—he never once has said anything to encourage me. I don't care for myself, but I'd rather die than disappoint you. You know when I was little I used to say that when I grew up I would be a carpenter or a sailor. I loved the sea and I loved to drive nails. Now do you suppose if—if my voice fails us—that I could make a success of either of these other professions?

"I have not had a letter from you for ages. Are you too busy to write to

"JEAN?"

That night Hazel went to sleep with a tear left to dry on each cheek. The next day she closed the apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann and moved into her new

quarters, which were close to the carved sandalwood screens, the red geraniums, the ugly rugs and the beautiful ones, the piano whose yellowed ivory keys had been touched, in days gone by, by the fingers of world-famous artists, the scarred walls which had resounded voices that afterward had become great, and the little old man who taught her music and philosophy.

Days and weeks and months flew by, each with its monotony of study, practice and recreation. The last of these Hazel took in a small park nearby. Here the women of the neighborhood gathered together in their hours of leisure which were few and far between. Here the children in soiled clothes, with dirty little faces and matted hair, chattered away in their foreign tongue or fought for scraps of fruit or sweetmeats which they had dug from the refuse barrels behind the markets. Here the men came to rest after their day of labor, and sprawling out on the worn, wooden benches and between puffs from strong pipes, told each other how the country *should* be run!

The sad remains of a once lovely fountain stared abjectly across the gravel walks at the flowerless flower beds which the park commissioners had long since forgotten. The thirsty little birds hopped about the rim of the dry cement depression under the broken, dust covered marble water nymphs and twittered and chirped reproachfully to the passersby or to the occupants of the nearest benches.

Sometimes M. Dupont came to the park, too. And Hazel would watch the look of infinite sadness which would settle over his face as they wormed their way through the flotsam and jetsam of civilization and it gave to her a more perfect understanding of the little man with the white hair and deep set eyes who lived in a shabby, dejected old house in a slimy part of the city, when he might have dwelt in "marble halls" on a boulevard.

CHAPTER XII

A LLEN HAMILTON met his sister at the steamship's dock and his first glance at her face told him that something was wrong. He held her off at arm's length and looked at her with his keen searching gray eyes. What he saw made his heart throb with sudden apprehension.

Eleanor's eyes did not meet his squarely. The pink in her cheeks was—to his knowing eye—artificial. The cheeks themselves were less rounded. There were dark shadows where formerly delicate curves had been. But the thing which tightened his heart strings was a hard look about the cupid bow mouth. The lips, in the forming of which nature had been very generous and which her late husband had often said were made for smiles and kisses, were smiling a forced smile which contained no semblance of joy or happiness.

He lifted her into his big throbbing limousine and after a hand-clasp and a word of welcome to the Billy Nortons, he climbed in beside her. Then he turned to his sister and lifting a diffident hand from her lap asked: "What is it, Eleanor? Something has happened. Something is wrong. What is it?"

Eleanor shivered as though a cold draught had struck her, and despite her effort to make it otherwise, her voice was chilled and colorless when she looked up at her brother and answered:

"What an old grandfather we are getting to be! Really, there is nothing 'wrong,' as you call it. Nothing has happened of which Hazel—I mean Jean—has not written you."

"Then you are ill."

"I have never been so well."

"Then—there is something—is Jean all right?"

Allen's hand tightened its grip on his sister's hand until she almost cried out with the pain. He waited with an unconscious breathlessness for the reply to his question.

"Why do you ask me such ridiculous things, Allen?" In place of the lilt which had always been the predominating thing in Eleanor's voice there was something metallic, something hard and impatient.

"But is she all right?" he insisted, his eyes holding hers by sheer force of will.

"Of course she is. What on earth could happen to the child?"

Allen Hamilton, without analyzing it or its cause, felt a great wave of relief sweep over him.

"You seem not to be conscious of the fact that Jean is no longer a child but a woman grown. There are many dangers that lie in wait for a woman which would scorn a child."

"Ah, you do not know Hazel—I see now that it is going to be a difficult thing to call her anything but Hazel—she is really wonderful, Allen. She has a brilliance of wit and a depth of mind which make her positively uncanny. She is hundreds of years older than I will ever be. She belongs to some other planet, the inhabitants of which are farther advanced than those of this one. M. Dupont feeds her upon his philosophies and theories gleaned from musty yellow books and she is assimilating a vast knowledge of everything under the sun,—music, of course, being first and last of all else. I remember one night when I was dreadfully sleepy, she sat down on the foot of my bed and told me the history of music—making word pictures of the first musical instrument and its worshipers. I went to sleep with the words 'the voice of the soul' ringing in my ears. And I remember I dreamed that night that I sat on a rock and thrummed the strings of a hideous instrument which wailed and wriggled until it escaped me when it at once

took form and began dancing its dry rattling bones before me, pleading the while that I give back its soul."

For an instant Eleanor's face was illuminated with one of her old smiles, then it clouded again. Her brother took up the broken thread.

"I knew that she was developing rapidly. Her letters are rare gems of humor, satire and serious thought. They have made life something new to me. I regret daily that our silly scheme for caring for her should have been the means of sending her off to another country. I should love to have had her near me. I have never heard her speak of religion, yet she has given one to me. I can't tell just what it is that is in those letters, but no one could read them without desiring that their writer have faith in him. They breathe of purity and innocence—of a hatred for all things unclean and they instil those things into the reader. I wish I could run over there and see her, but I can't—at least not just yet. I wish, too, that we had persuaded her to allow us to talk the thing over with Jim Atherton in the beginning and thus have been on a more solid footing. We might even have obtained her consent that we should legally adopt her. As it is she is, as she says, 'being somebody that she is not.' " After a brief pause: "She might be called by a thousand different names, but to me she will always be Jean,—Jean of the dark, haunting eyes, the shabby leather bag and the yellow mongrel dog."

"Poor old Tiger!" mused Eleanor. "Do you know, she has talked so much to me about Tiger that I almost feel that I murdered a human being when I separated him from his young mistress. She commissioned me to go out to the old farm where you took his stiffened old body for its last resting place and to put a couple of well-cooked pork chops on his grave under the scraggly brown rose bush. She didn't see anything particularly funny about the request, either, and when I laughed she indignantly explained to me that it was no funnier

than the placing of flowers on the graves of dead humans,—that Tiger never had cared much for flowers but that he had been passionately fond of pork chops during his stay on this sphere! When I could not resist asking her how soon, she thought, Tiger would come to the surface of his grave and eat those pork chops, she answered, 'Oh, about as soon as men come up to smell the flowers!'

Eleanor laughed again almost mirthfully at the reminiscence, but her brother looked out of the little glass window at the crowded thoroughfare and the eyes, usually a little stern and very keen, were suspiciously moist.

Later, when they had reached home and Eleanor had put on some loose lacy garment, he sat in his sister's boudoir sipping her favorite brand of tea and watched her slim jeweled fingers flutter nervously above the tea things on the small inlaid table. There was something wrong. Of that he was sure. But what was it? With painful anxiety he watched the moving fingers and listened to the forced laughter, and to the hard ring in his sister's voice.

Eleanor chafed at his scrutiny. She tried hard to appear unconscious of those penetrating eyes which had searched out the flaws in many an opera staging and had mercilessly sought and found the weak spot in many a singer's throat. He would discover her secret some day. Of that she felt sure, and almost she began to wish that she had stayed in Paris and braved the questioning of a thousand eyes less keen.

Restlessly she rose from her chair and going to her open bag where it lay near a dressing-table fumbled in its depths for an instant, then brought forth a small leather-bound kodak book.

"These are some pictures which we have taken recently. You will see Jean in them in many moods." Eleanor placed the book in Allen's hands, then seated herself again, this time her chair with its back to the

uncharitable light which came in through the long French windows.

Mechanically Allen turned the pages whereon were glued pictures of various French scenes having no central point of view and obviously taken to commemorate some memorable occasion. There were indifferent landscapes, monotonous water scenes, parks, meadows, drives, houses and all the other things one sees in a kodak book. People seem to forget that the only interesting thing about pictures of that kind are the occasions which they commemorate and with which the defenseless person who has been asked to admire them is not familiar. There were a few groups of people—looking very much as people always do when they are asked to stand up before an ordinary truth-telling camera in the hands of an amateur photographer who doesn't know the first thing about retouching or removing the ugly parts of the picture and strengthening the good points, making the old young and the young beautiful. They looked like prisoners of war lined up before a listening row of long steel barrels.

Allen grinned when some of those grotesquely posed people, who seemed to be desiring nothing in the world so much as to appear gracefully "natural" and at ease, looked up at him from the rapidly turning pages.

Suddenly his attention was arrested. The book remained open at one place and the man who held it took a step nearer to the light.

He was looking down into the mobile face of a young girl. She gazed back at him with calm dark eyes—set well apart—in which a hundred things struggled for supremacy. There was innocence and there were knowledge, faith and cynicism, enthusiasm and indifference, pride and humbleness, defiance and wistfulness.

The girl sat in the low seat of a long French racing car. She wore a simple white gown and a wide brimmed straw hat on which was a single large poppy. A pair of saucy white canvas shoes stuck out from the hem of

the gown. A wisp of dark hair, with a light spot in the hollow of a wave that was the camera's best reproduction of a sheen, lay across one lovely cheek. She was gazing straight into the camera with a wonderful poise and sweet fearlessness for the leveled steel barrels. There was nothing stiff or fixed in her pose. There was lacking that self-consciousness which had characterized the pictures of the persons on the preceding pages.

Allen Hamilton looked down into the calm beautiful face with the eyes of a hungry man who looks into a shop window where is displayed many delicacies for the human palate. Like M. Dupont, he had been lonely all his life. Even his wildest, gayest college days had lacked something,—what it was he could never divine.

Have you never been hungry for—you knew not what? And has that hunger annoyed you with its indefinite yet persistent desire until you offered it all the viands you could think of and finally found the one thing that would appease it?

There are some human beings who hunger all their lives for love—of no particular variety. It can be mother love. It can be father love or the love of sister, brother, sweetheart, friend. But it must have a quality which each of those kinds of love often lacks. It must understand. It must make of life a glorious thing. It must radiate good rather than preach it. It must be sunshiny and transparent. It must fit into all moods with equal understanding.

Allen Hamilton's mother had died when he was a very small child. His father had lived only a few years after her death and during those few years Allen had seen him only when the rest of the world did not wish to see him and that was not often, for the world, like the little boy in knickerbockers, loved the gay irresponsible man who was the little boy's father. At school and later at college, the shyness of the biggest and strongest boy in his classes was mistaken for reserve and uncon-

geniality and he was left much alone—missing by a hair's breadth warm and unselfish friendships. His sister had from infancy tyrannized him. She had never been strong—at least that is what every one had always said, although once when her tiny white teeth had been buried in the tender flesh of his half developed forearm it had taken the combined strength of the butler and nurse to set him free and even then she had fought them like a newly-captured little wildcat. She had been a waxen little creature who aroused sympathy and love in the hearts of every one with whom she came in contact. She had ridden through her youth on a vehicle of worship and flattery and like a queen she carried her subjects with her. He had never complained because she had so little time or companionship for him. He had been proud and glad that she held such an exalted position of popularity. But he had looked longingly into the shop window and had hungered for the delicacies which were handed across the counter with such unlimited generosity to the satiated customers whose gluttony made them always ask for more.

Satiety and hunger! Why are they always rubbing shoulders? Why does not the man whose hunger has been gratified step aside and allow the man who still hungers to take his place for a brief time at least?

So the years had woven themselves into a chain of crude daily happenings. They had become merely a series of contracts with famous artists whose temperaments rubbed off or slopped over on the man who paid their exorbitant salaries and dared not allow them to know that he was human. The years had hammered his metal into a monotonously grinding machine. It seemed indefatigable and no one had ever inspected it to see if it needed any new attachment which it did not already have.

The years had done all those things but they had not appeased or made less poignant this great man's hunger for that indefinable something.

Then had come the little girl and her yellow dog. Out of pity he had taken them to his sister's home. There he had learned her story and something in her defiance of the gay crowd which had gone to her home and looked her over, and perhaps a prescience of what she would mean to him had made him want to take her into his heart as his own, a warm pulsating being who would belong exclusively to him. She had not favored his plan of adopting her but she had believed the ridiculous story which he had told her and had gone to France at his bidding to study the thing he had said he wished her to study. Then had come her letters. There had never before been letters like them, he was sure. They understood. They were wonderfully companionable. They were rare, beautiful delicacies that satisfied his hunger. He no longer stood outside the charmed circle of those who were favored of the gods. He stood with eager outstretched hands which, in spite of their eagerness, were still a little timid, and he was made new and young again by the things which dropped into them.

Now as he looked into the calm eyes—calm despite the battle being fought there—calm like the sphinx which has witnessed the downfall and uprising of nations, his arms ached for her.

There was a whimsical uplift at the corners of her mouth, and when he noticed it he smiled, for he understood it, like all those who are en rapport understand all things which concern each other.

"Allen! I have spoken to you three times. Why don't you reply?"

The man shook himself like a huge bear just awakened. He drew up his chair and sat down.

"I was so engrossed in a picture I have found here of Jean."

"Do you like it? Do you think she has changed much?"

"Of course I like it. No, she has not changed. She

will never change. Oh, yes, physically, if you will, but that part of her which is not physical will never change. It is now as it was when she and her dog first slept under this roof and you called me to see her asleep with her dark head resting against the shaggy neck of the dog and her tanned cheeks stained with dried tears. She has not changed and she never will."

Eleanor smiled and nodded her head—things which she always did whenever she found herself in water beyond her depth, and which served very well in lieu of clever responses.

"Who, by the way, took that picture?"

Allen held out the book that his sister might see the picture to which he referred.

"Brice Mathews. He says that it is by far the best picture of Jean in the book."

"I suppose that the car in which she is sitting belonged to him?"

Eleanor nodded her golden head and unconsciously her brother sighed. Slowly he began once more to turn the pages, giving each of them only the briefest glance.

Then a second time his attention was suddenly arrested. He looked long and intently at a group of men and women who stood on a grassy slope, evidently in the midst of an animated conversation, and obviously unaware of the proximity of the camera. He recognized most of the crowd. There were the Billy Nortons, the Mummy and Winifred, Brice Mathews, Jim Atherton, and one or two others. At the extreme edge of the group stood a tall angularly built man staring through large, tortoise shell rimmed glasses at a couple—a man and a woman—who stood near. The couple at whom the man was staring with poorly concealed insolence and sneering contempt were Eleanor Rollins and a man whom Allen had never seen. Eleanor was smiling up into the man's face with all her coquetry at its best. The man beside her was leaning toward her with a world of earnestness in his nice, clean-cut face.

Allen drew his chair nearer the one occupied by his sister and laying the open book on her lap said:

"There are some unfamiliar faces here. Tell me about them."

Eleanor glanced down at the picture and her face went a little white under the rouge.

"Those? Oh, those are two gentlemen who are intimate with most of the American colony. The one with whom I am talking is the Duc de Gourman."

Allen waited for her to continue but she did not. Instead she started to close the book. But he took it gently from her and holding it so that she might still see the picture, he looked into the beautiful face which had grown a little harder and a trifle less beautiful in the last half minute and said insistently:

"And the other man? You are forgetting to tell me about him."

Eleanor bit her curved under lip. She was very tired. She did wish he would go away and leave her alone that she might rest. Striving to speak lightly, she answered her brother, wishing passionately as she did so that he would take his truth-compelling eyes from her face.

"Didn't I tell you that he was a gentleman—intimately acquainted in the American colony in Paris?"

"Yes. But that isn't telling me what I wish to know. It does not answer my question. There are a great *many* such gentlemen."

Eleanor tapped the toe of one pink slipper nervously against the floor.

"If you can't get along without the details here they are. He is François Louveau. He is a member of a very old family (so he claims) whose only living representative he is. He inherited an impoverished estate from which—so Mrs. Rex 'whispers'—he has squeezed the last piece of silver, wrung it dry, as it were. He is invited everywhere, liked by a few, loved by no one and positively hated by many. He is not the kind of man who would make a good husband, yet there are a

great many ambitious mothers—with marketable daughters and a few millions of American dollars—who simmer and smile at him and treat him prematurely 'as one of the family' because he is considered by them as a great catch and well worth any price. Does that tell you enough?"

"Not quite. Why is he looking at you in that insolent manner?"

Allen was quick to notice the shiver which ran over his sister's body. He reached out his big hand and laid it tenderly, protectingly over the clenched cold little hand of his sister.

It was hard for him to cross-examine her and had he loved her less he would not have done so. But the insolence in the face of the man with the glasses had aroused an anger in him that was akin to that of a bear when it scents some danger which threatens its young.

"Tell me, little sunny-haired sister."

He had not so addressed her for a great many years and the old endearing term brought back to life in her a half-weaned affection for this big brother in whose hair there were already streaks of gray.

"He—I—Well, you see that expression is an habitual one with him."

Eleanor pushed aside his hand and rose to her feet with a yawn which was meant to dismiss him, but her brother still sat in his chair looking thoughtfully at the picture of the group on the hillside.

Eleanor busied herself with the unpacking of her traveling bag. Her nervous, trembling fingers succeeded only in tangling and disarranging the contents. Never in her life had she either packed or unpacked a piece of luggage. Her maids had been expert at both. Now as she lifted out the toilet accessories, bits of ribbon, a crushed lace boudoir cap, cobwebby handkerchiefs and numerous other things, she was telling herself that if her brother asked her another question she would *scream*.

Allen sighed and closed the book. He was mystified.

He was not assured. He wanted to go downstairs to his den, where he could think out a possible solution to the problem and study some other pictures of Jean which still remained to be seen.

He paused on his way from the room and laid one arm around his sister's shoulders.

"You need a good rest. Will you promise to take one when I have gone?"

It was with much difficulty that Eleanor restrained a cry of relief. Without lifting her head she answered with the monosyllable he desired. In an instant he was gone and she was alone. Throwing herself face down on the bed she sobbed hysterically.

That night when a few guests had arrived for dinner Eleanor greeted them with a half-hearted, languid air, surprising to these intimates who had known her always as a gay young butterfly. But before the evening was far advanced, whatever her troubles—real or imaginary—they were forgotten and there blazed from her face as warm and bright a fire of life and enthusiasm as had ever been seen there.

It is said that those possessing natures like hers are fortunate,—that they recover from troubles and griefs quickly and that happiness is never far from their doors even on their unhappiest days. Who shall agree with the expounders of the belief that these people are fortunate? Are they not subjects for pity rather? True, they do not feel trouble for long but,—do they feel happiness, in its turn, for any longer time? Are they not usually dissatisfied creatures whose constant desire for something which they have not keeps them going at a terrific pace and makes aliens of all the simple, little trampled-on things that are contentment-giving? True, their sorrows do not make deep or lasting impressions upon them, but neither do their joys. Their cares do not dig deep into their souls. Neither do their loves. They lack that depth of feeling which men and women should possess. Who would not prefer to touch with his soul the very

bottom of the blackest and deepest pit of despair if when his joys came he could ascend to their highest summits? What manner of creature is satisfied with half descents and half ascents? With half measures of feeling? It is true that water slides easily from the back of a duck, —but so also does quicksilver!

Eleanor wept bitterly and none too softly when she wept and she laughed merrily and none too softly when she laughed. Her tears and her laughter went hand in hand through her life. Either of them was easy of birth and equally easy of death and neither of them ever lived very long or very well. They lived the pace that kills. Then they died and were immediately forgotten.

Her joys had been many and her sorrows few—most of the latter being imaginary. She had fluttered along on the edge of things, taking the crumbs and calling them morsels, never remembering to-day the good or the bad crumbs of yesterday.

CHAPTER XIII

ON the day following the one on which Eleanor arrived home Allen Hamilton had occasion to call at an office in the vicinity of old Trinity Church. As he passed the open gate which led into the grounds surrounding it, Jean's face came before his eyes. There was a whimsical uplift to the corners of her lips, but her eyes held an inscrutable something which gripped his heart.

Involuntarily he retraced his steps and went into the grounds where lay the little piles of dust of men who had made history. With no conscious effort his feet carried him in through the high Gothic door of Trinity Church. The age-darkened walls dully resounded his footfall despite the carpeted aisle. The silence of the place where had worshipped men of a dead age was so profound that almost the ticking of a watch or a heavy breath could have been heard.

As one in a trance who is led by unseen hands Allen walked down the aisle, past the plain wooden benches of the pews where had knelt or sat men in powdered wigs and women in crinolined skirts. When he had neared the altar he paused and stood with bent head.

In one hand he carried his hat and walking stick, in the other a thick yellow envelope around which was a wide rubber band.

But hat, stick and documents were forgotten. There was an unprecedented awe in his heart for all things sacred,—a new desire to get close to the thing men called righteousness.

There were so many creeds, so many cults, so many forms and kinds of worship. But Allen Hamilton had lived his life since his Sunday School days without

feeling the need of any one of them. To-day as he stood with bared head before the time-stained altar of Old Trinity he felt suddenly and without questioning or reasoning the sore need of a faith on which to lean.

For a long time he stood there in that unconscious attitude of reverence,—for a much longer time than he ever knew. Then he turned about and went slowly back down the aisle.

In the high door, around which bronze tablets told the tales of Trinity and her earliest worshippers, he stood with hesitating feet. The warm sunshine fell on his bare head, on the bronze tablets, the open door and, for a space, upon the floor behind him. Then he started down the little graveled path that wound its uncertain way through a maze of mounds and crumbling gravestones, his head still bared and humbly bowed.

Suddenly his eyes caught sight of a crudely carved letter "J" on a brown headstone which leaned awry at one end of a narrow mound and from which great scales had loosened and fallen, crumbling into tiny bits and peppering the earth and green grass round about. Mechanically he halted. Stooping, he read the simple inscription—almost illegible where old Father Time had written across it—and again the sweet piquant face of Jean arose before him. It said:

"Here lyeth Jennie, wife of John Green. She was a goode woman and died in the fayth."

With no thought of why he did it, Allen took from his pocket a pencil and notebook and wrote down the name. A little while later he went out at the open iron gate and made his way thoughtfully back to his office.

That afternoon the busy force in the great theatrical magnate's office became conscious of something warm and human in the great man—something new and strange that had never made itself felt before. That night a

generous bouquet of flowers was carried into Old Trinity's grounds by an employee of a well known Fifth Avenue florist, and placed at the foot of a brown-stone slab which leaned awry and from which the name *Jennie Green* and the simple inscription were almost obliterated. A week later Allen Hamilton sent the following letter flying across the sea to Jean:

"My Dear Little Girl:

"You can't know what it would have meant to me had you consented to accompany Eleanor home. It is wonderfully nice to have her with me again but I should so have loved to have had my two little girls together in the big old house once more. Eleanor tells me, however, as you yourself have so many times told me, that you are determined to let nothing interfere with your work with M. Dupont,—not even a visit home. Don't you think that that is carrying it a little far? A short visit over here should scarcely be looked upon as an interruption. Then, too, it is not good to study and practice for years without cessation. It is not good for you nor for your voice to work so prodigiously. I get more anxious daily to see the Jean at whom I once 'bellowed,' but if you say again that you will not leave your work until you have done the thing which I sent you to do, then I must accept it as an ultimatum, and I shall know you only as the chum of a dear departed dog whose name was Tiger, and by what your letters and pictures tell me of you.

"Eleanor does not look well. I suppose, though, the rough voyage is responsible for that.

"The Billy Nortons are giving a dinner and dance to-night for the Mummy and Winifred, who arrived on this side of the pond two days ago. I had not intended going—I have outgrown those things. They are things that to me seem to belong to the vintage of football and débuts. But Eleanor insists that I be one of 'those present,' so to please her I will don my best smile and

wander around with some matron hanging to my arm who ought to have applied her rheumatism liniment and gone to bed hours before.

"Brice Mathews is expected home on the next steamer. I can't see why 'the crowd' didn't get together and charter a steamer and come home *en famille*.

"Eleanor says that you've met and know quite well those who came out to the old farm that day to see Jim Atherton's legacy.

"No one is hearing from Jim Atherton. The Billy Nortons say that he seems to have dropped completely off the earth. I am wondering if you will ever see him now that you have alienated yourself from the 'froth,' as you call it?

"Monday after next will be your birthday. Nineteen, isn't it? I am sending you a trifle with the hope that it will reach you on that day. I shall find a quiet corner at the club on that evening and have dinner there alone. Seeing that you are a young lady grown and that I am a sort of guardian to you, would it not be perfectly right and proper for me to pretend that you are sitting opposite me at the table?

"Are you very careful of your throat? Please do not be reckless or careless of your glorious health. Eleanor says that you splash about in the worst sorts of weather. Jean, I don't wish to scold you, but I must insist that you be more prudent."

When Hazel opened the parcel which she had received through Allen Hamilton's Paris bankers a day or two after the arrival of that letter, all the eager curiosity and feverish anticipation of a child were in her face and busy fingers. Hastily she removed the outer wrappings. An ordinary pasteboard box came into view. Quickly the lid was lifted, only to show a second box. This one was of purple velvet. Breathlessly she touched the tiny spring. The lid flew back and there, on a bed of white satin, lay a string of pearls.

With a cry of delight Hazel gazed into the purple velvet box, not daring to touch them for the fear that they might vanish. They had a soft radiating luster and, as if they were congealed tears, they were awe-inspiring, fascinating.

Suddenly her lips began to tremble. Two great tears welled up in her starry eyes, overflowed, flooded the long silky lashes and dropped onto the white satin bed beside their sisters. She! Jean Delaine! An orphan! A penniless waif! What had she ever done to deserve the beautiful friendship of this wonderful man? Why were the fates kind to her when so many people more worthy than she were being forever chastised? Could it be that it was true,—that part of the Scripture of which Rev. Bixby had once told her and on which she had spent many childhood hours pondering, bewildered and puzzled?

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," the good man had said. If that were true then what of those on whom He showered His blessings?

She had been a wilful child with strong convictions and a stronger will power which had never allowed her to swerve from those convictions. She had gone her own way with a doggedness that had won for her the hatred of the man whom her mother had last married. The convictions and her dogged fealty to them had made her abandon her old home and the clean honorable man to whom she had been bequeathed and go out into a world of which she knew nothing. That stubborn hard-headedness had refused to let her "belong" to any one, causing her to run away from one good man and to refuse to be adopted by another. She had taken unto herself her mother's maiden name that the first man might not claim her. She had met him times without number and despite his recognition of her had doggedly made him say at last that he believed black was white. Again and again had she thrust her head into a lion's mouth and the lions that had slaughtered so many had

not harmed a hair of her head. The fates still smiled and gave her the choicest of its stores.

Ah! What did she not owe to that kindest of men, Allen Hamilton? But he should reap! He should reap a rich harvest for all that he was sowing. Mary Rowden and Enid Burk and all the other Marys and Enids of the Opera could take all and give nothing—could strike the word “gratitude” from their vocabularies and their lives, but she—she would pay with her heart’s blood if necessary.

Lifting the shimmering string of pearls from the velvet box, Hazel pressed it against her soft warm cheek. Then closing her eyes she felt with her tapering fingers each smooth graduating pearl and from her heart of hearts went up a little prayer, a prayer that asked simply to be made worthy. “Paying back” or “giving a harvest” to the man who was doing so much for her had become an obsession with her. Day after day she talked of it with M. Dupont and night after night when she said the prayer which she had not yet outgrown she asked to be allowed to give to the man across the seas the bountiful harvest which he so deserved.

On the night of her birthday she sat at the table with M. Dupont as her vis-à-vis while M. Dupont’s valet and man of all work served the daintiest of birthday dinners.

“Please tell me, monsieur, shall I ever be able to repay?”

“But how, then, can I tell, my dear?” It was always thus that the old man evaded that ever present question.

“Oh, you answer evasively. Surely you must know if my voice is good, bad, or indifferent.”

“Is it then that the voice is to shoulder your responsibility?”

“No! No! But——”

“And if you had no voice, no great voice I mean. What then?”

The girl's face went pale. One of her slim hands clutched a corner of the tablecloth.

"If—if my voice could not pay—then—then— Ah, then, monsieur, I would have to find some other way."

"Bien! That is the right spirit. But we shall see—we shall see!"

In the center of the table coiled around the base of an almost priceless bronze antique vase was Allen Hamilton's birthday offering. The vase reflected two of the pearls in one small spot where an ignorant, irreverent hand had once tried to burnish it. From the wide mouth of the vase protruded the thorny green stems, with their crimson-petaled heads, of a cluster of American Beauty roses which M. Dupont had thoughtfully ordered for this sweetest occasion.

One of the high sandal-wood screens stood behind the girl's chair throwing into bold relief the small well-shaped head around which two glistening black braids were wound but in no way robbing it of its boyish look. There was a birdlike poise to the head which in itself was an added attraction. The clear cut profile was like a cameo or an old ivory carving in a sandal-wood frame, the only splotch of color being the vivid streak of red that was the mouth.

Old M. Dupont leaned an elbow on the table's edge and peered out from under a waxen, blue veined hand at the exquisite picture opposite him. Then under his breath he repeated, "we shall see—we shall see."

When they had finished their last course of the birthday dinner M. Dupont opened the thick steel door of his small wall safe and with understanding eyes watched Hazel open a box which he had taken therefrom and deposit in its depths the purple velvet case containing the string of pearls. With a faint, almost inaudible sigh Hazel returned the box to her instructor and saw it placed in the little vault. Again a sigh fluttered across her thin red lips as the thick steel door swung shut.

"Until the night of my *début*, when I pay back the first instalment of my debt," she whispered.

That was her farewell to Allen's latest gift. Just as on those other birthdays and Christmases when she had brought to M. Dupont's little wall safe some bauble which had come to her from the man to whom she felt she owed so much. She regretted the hiding away of so much beauty. But she could not bring herself to the point of considering it proper to wear these costly things until she herself had a value—an intrinsic value. It was this dogged determination to follow her convictions—to refuse to endeavor to make four out of three and three—that had made her a thing of keenest joy to the heart of her little white-haired teacher.

The street corner lamps had long been lighted when M. Dupont left Hazel at the door of her new lodgings. She stood in the open door watching the little figure with its bent shoulders make its ghostly way down the poorly-lighted street. An uncertain shadow lengthened grotesquely behind it until it neared the next dim street light, when it shortened gradually. At last it became but a dark spot directly beneath the figure which was growing faint and indistinct.

"Another of God's noblemen!" she said to herself. "How fortunate and blessed am I!"

For a moment longer she stood looking out at the spectral buildings across the way. A few of the sounds which seem to belong to a midsummer night came up the street to her. The honk of an automobile horn, the faint far-off barking of a dog, a muffled cry of a street gamin, the clack, clack of a horse's hoofs, and from far away the chimes that told of the half hour which had just slipped off into the past. A subtle sadness stole over the girl's shadowed face and in the dim light something shone and glistened in her dark eyes.

Slowly she turned and went down the narrow corridor to where a broad shaft of light came from a door leading into a living-room. Near an open window

sat a gray-haired woman rocking monotonously to and fro and fanning herself with a faded Japanese fan which had once been highly colored but which had lost its last claim to beauty. The rocking and the fanning were in perfect time, as was also the regular tapping of one shabby shoe against the threadbare ingrain carpet. The woman's hair was twisted in a tight knot at the back of her head. A pair of spectacles sat in an unbalanced, crooked manner upon her thin nose. One steel bow had come loose from the frame and had been fastened into place with a piece of red twine,—the kind that is usually used by pharmacists. Her outer raiment was not of the kind commonly referred to as a "gown" or even "frock." It was—strictly speaking—a loose wrapping of some cheap cotton material which, like the fan, was faded.

At a round table in the center of the room sat a young woman, her head resting in the palm of her hand, her elbow on the table. The other arm hung limply at her side and her shoulders bent forward, making a hollow where a rounded bust should have been. There was an air of utter dejection and weariness about her entire figure. Even the wisp of hair that was of a nondescript color hung unnoticed over one heavy-lidded eye. She was speaking in a colorless monotone:

"What if father *was* born in France? Is that a sufficient reason for dragging us over to the wretched country? What difference does it make about the birthplace of a poor, hard-working man like father? No one will ever waste time writing his biography, and as for seeing the country where he happened to first see daylight,—what good is it doing him or us?"

The look of sadness fled from Hazel's face as she paused on the threshold.

"To say the least, Gertrude, your father was grossly inconsiderate when he allowed himself to be born in any country without first consulting you. But since the offense is one of the dead past why not begin to

ask yourself if your daughter may not denounce you, when she shall have arrived on the scene, because you were born in America,—that plebeian country where there is not even the ghost of a duke or baron or count and where everybody is supposed to be addicted to chewing gum and pork?”

The girl at the table had lifted her head with a look of eagerness and interest at the first word from her mother's roomer and the woman near the window had ceased simultaneously to rock and fan.

The shadow of a smile flickered for an instant on the pale face of the girl at the table and her shoulders straightened a little.

“I shall never have a daughter unless I have something more than poverty and labor to offer her.” There came a somberness into her face once more.

“But in that event *you* may some day find yourself sitting by an open window like madam there,—only you will be alone! What a glorious thing you will be missing because there is no daughter sitting near you at a table cheerily telling you that your husband should have had more sense than to choose for his birthplace what ever country the poor man happened to have made his début in! A loving daughter makes life so much more worth while to the mother that the daughter never minds in the least the poverty and labor that were also her mother's lot before her.”

For one brief second the girl at the table looked a trifle embarrassed and glanced apologetically across at the silent woman near the open window. Then the sullen look came back to her.

“Oh, yes, it is easy, Miss Hazel, to say those things when the poverty and labor belong to some one else. But you can't know what it means to work from getting-up time 'til going to bed time, day after day, and all for the mere privilege of living more days to continue the round of getting up, working and going to bed. I tell you that the people who must work, beg or

steal to-day in order that they may live to work, beg or steal to-morrow have no right to have children. It is not fair to bring them into a world that is already using themselves so badly. To-night as I passed through the square below here I had to pick my way through whole droves of children—already squabbling for dirty, unwholesome scraps of food—and I knew as I looked at their pinched, crafty little faces what the *finale* would be for most of them. For some the stone walls of a prison, for others an exit under the supervision of the government, for a few who may be brave enough an exit by the aid of their own hands and sure weapons, and for the rest a horrible series of days of labor, nothing but labor (if they happen to be well and strong) and begging if they happen not to be strong.”

Hazel crossed the room and standing before the girl whose vehement words had sunk deep into her heart, she said quietly:

“You say that I cannot understand this thing of which you speak because the poverty and labor are not mine? Ma chère amie, there is no one in the world so poor as myself so far as gold goes. I am one of your last named kind. I am a beggar. That is, I live on money that belongs to some one else and I am piling up debt and only God knows when I can cancel it. I work every day, and many of the nights find me as tired as you yourself. I have no mother, no father, no sister, no brother. Yet I think that I am rich because God has given me a few good friends. I came here to your home to share with you your riches. There is an atmosphere here that I have not known since the death of my mother”—Hazel paused and closed her eyes for an instant—“it is the atmosphere,” she continued, “of home and family love. Every time I see your little brother climb into your lap and ask to hear again the story of the ‘three little pigs’ or ‘Jack the giant killer,’ I say to myself, ‘what a fortunate girl!’ And when you tell your father and mother good-night and crawl into

bed with a drowsy half-grown sister who locks her young arms about your neck and goes to sleep with a half-said prayer on her lips I envy you! You can't know how I envy you! All your theories may be right according to Shaw, but Oh, my dear, there is lots of wealth that is not gold!"

A sob—half-stifled—came from the gray-haired woman at the window. With a little cry of remorse the girl, whose wisps of hair hung unnoticed around her face, sprang to her feet and ran to the woman's side.

"Mother! I'm sorry. I hurt you. Please, dear——"

Hazel stood a moment at the table, forgotten. She was an outsider. She was not their kin. She was alone. Sighing, she turned abruptly and left the room.

Until long after midnight she sat at her window looking out into the night. It must have been about ten o'clock that she heard the members of the family going their separate ways for the night. Their little calls of "good-night" and "pleasant dreams" came through the open transom to her. Then the house settled down to the quiet of slumber.

At three in the morning she had finished a letter to the man who had sent her a string of pearls. Then pushing her damp hair into the confines of a soft lace cap she crept into her bed, where she fell asleep at last with the first glow of another sweltering summer day.

CHAPTER XIV

WITH the first cool days of fall came the tanned summer resorters back to Paris and metropolitan gaieties. The numberless trunks which, at the beginning of the season, had carried away gorgeous creations of silks and laces brought back to the city a jumbled lot of soiled, mussed and out-of-style raiment doomed to grace no more beaches, ballrooms or cool and inviting verandas. Already numerous maids were planning just what changes would be necessary to make those scorned creations fit themselves. Mistress and maid are not always architecturally the same and the latter often prefers comfort to style.

Once more Paris is the center of all the gay world. Once more an endless chain of cabs and motors goes up and down the Bois, like the chain around a sprocket wheel, stopping here and there to pick up a fare or to be dismissed by one. In all directions from the Opera a gaily colored throng moves constantly. Rue de la Paix, le Boulevard des Capucines, l'Avenue de l'Opéra—all display their share of the passing show of the early fall. From the restaurants come the newly awakened hub-bub of social life, with an under current of music and the clinking of glasses. At the Ritz the swiftly gliding waiters and the fingers of the men who are members of its orchestra take on new energy. Even the Maître d'Hôtel has a new gleam in his eyes and a fresh interest in life in general and the life of the Ritz in particular.

One of the most striking figures seen at the Ritz nowadays is that of Jim Atherton. There is an elegance and polish about the man which set him in a class by himself. There is a look of restlessness in his handsome

face, yet nothing about him suggests that which is blasé. He is alone usually, and sits far back in a secluded corner, where he sips an opalescent liquid from a tall, thin glass and smokes innumerable long black cigars. He gives one the impression of being horribly lonely, yet scarcely a man or a woman passes his table who does not flash him a smile of recognition. Many of the smiles contain an invitation, but smiles and invitations are received in the manner of a man who, though lonely, still wishes to be alone.

Years ago Jim Atherton had become satiated with all that society could give him, but, freed from the necessity of doing anything in the business world, he had continued to offer to his jaded palate the things at hand which had the flavor of a never-changing sameness. The only difference in his daily diversions were the addresses of the houses to which he went and the names of his hostesses. To-day it was a bridge party where one said the same things to the same people that one had said yesterday at a débutante tea and would again say to-morrow at the dinner given in honor of—perhaps a pet monkey.

When he had asked Winifred Blake to marry him he had reached that stage where domesticity seemed to be the only antidote for *ennui*. He had liked Winifred, and believing himself to be invulnerable to love, had told her in a most unloverlike way that he believed he could make her happy and that he was positive that she could make him *contented*, which was far better. Then had come the day when he had heard old Demeral's will. To every one else Jim's legacy had been a huge joke, to Jim it had assumed gigantic proportions of seriousness. He had gone with the Billy Nortons and Winifred to view his inheritance and had found a madcap girl whose dark eyes looked past the flesh and skin of him deep into the irresponsible shrunken thing he had pleased to call his soul. Her quick wit, her naïve candor, her strange regard for the great ocean which

she endowed with life and her passionate love for the ungainly dog which happened to be her only companion had made his friends and himself seem unnatural—artificial.

He had returned home that night with ambitions, the first real ones he had ever known, making his sluggish pulse beat with unaccustomed rapidity. As he dined alone in his bachelor apartments he planned a future far in advance of "the week-end to week-end" which had always been the extreme boundary of his plans heretofore. The girl should be sent to school. She should develop all her wonderful possibilities. She should keep him busy providing for her the things young girls required at fashionable boarding schools. She should be dependent upon him. How sweet it would be to be *necessary* to some living thing,—to be appealed to when in doubt, to be trusted and relied upon with a child's unsullied faith! Unconsciously he was giving his fiancée no part in his dreams as he sat at his table that night. Indeed, he had quite forgotten her very existence until his servant brought to him a note from her which had arrived by messenger.

The note had been penned hastily upon Winifred's arrival at home. It said simply that the writer could by no means consider any possible association with the "little wildcat" whom they had that day visited. Of course she hoped, therefore, that Jim would find it convenient to turn the child over to one of the various Homes which charity had provided for orphans, leaving them both free to go their primrose way without being hampered by a young hyena.

He had read that note with varying emotions, chief of which was a feeling of nausea and disgust. Surprise, too, was his, yet it was curiously intermingled with a consciousness of relief. With tightly compressed lips he had written an answer and dispatched it at once,—telling her, with apology, that he, too, felt that any association between herself and the little girl whom they

had left by the sea would be incongruous. Since they both felt the same about the matter, and as he would not for a moment consider the abandonment of the child, he would leave her to put into English the only alternative left to them. A few days later the breaking off of the engagement which had existed between Winifred Blake and Jim Atherton began to be rumored about and the rumor was allowed to go unchallenged.

On the day following that on which he had made his first visit Jim had gone again to the old farmhouse by the sea. He drove there alone, full of an unwonted eagerness. When he found that Jean had disappeared a disappointment more poignant than any he had ever known took possession of his heart. He hurried back to the city, where the best private detectives to be had were put on the case. Much to the amusement of his friends, Jim grew more restless and more determined to find the child with each succeeding day. More than a year went by before he gave up hope. Then reluctantly he accepted the view taken by the detectives and friends alike that the girl, rather than be torn from her old home, had drowned herself in her beloved sea and that the dog had either been drowned, also, in an effort to save her or had wandered away to some place where he had died of grief.

Eleanor had managed that first year abroad to keep her young protégée well out of sight of those who had seen her as Jean Delaine. A year under the roof with Eleanor and six months alone in a quarter of the city which was not fashionable had changed Jean sufficiently so that they no longer feared an encounter with any one who had seen her prior to her departure for foreign soil. It was not the change of any one feature that made her seem to be some one else. When a girl has reached the borderline of womanhood and steps over into a new realm it does not change so much as a hair of her head. But—it changes the manner in which the hair is dressed. The change is in the ensemble,—the

metamorphosis of a child into womanhood, a chrysalis into a butterfly.

Jim had been hunting wild game in Africa in the hope that that excitement would cure his restlessness. But he attended a ball on the night of his arrival in Paris and at once discovered that the cure had not been a cure at all but merely palliative. That was a memorable night. He had met the girl,—slim and graceful as any of the wary, wild things which he had hunted in the jungle,—the girl who looked at him with Jean Delaine's wide dark eyes.

He went from the place that night with new hope in his heart, and in the days that followed it kept close to his heels despite the fact that everybody, including the girl herself, did their best to slaughter it. The oftener he saw the girl whom he believed to be Jean Delaine, the more interested he became in the woman she said she was.

There came a day at last when he could no longer endure to see another man—even when that other man happened to be Brice Mathews, as it most often did—looking into the dark velvety eyes of Hazel Willis. That this new thing in his life—this thing which was doing for him what even lion hunting had not done—this thing which was filling his days with something else than ennui, which was making of life a wondrous song instead of a colorless monotone—was LOVE did not occur to him until months after it had crept stealthily into his heart and closed the portals to the rest of the world and ennui forever. He might find a wealth of happiness in store for him, or he might find misery and despair, but never again would there be ennui and diffidence. Something had come to him which would never allow his brain to “fag” and which would keep him interested to the end of time.

When Eleanor Rollins had returned to America the possibility that Hazel might take different quarters for herself did not occur to him. So it was that when he

called at the apartment on the Boulevard Haussmann several days after Eleanor's departure it was only to find a small "To Let" sign on the door.

Ever since that day he had walked about the streets gazing eagerly into the faces of the passing throng. Sometimes he would follow for a block some lithe, girlish figure which happened to resemble, if even in the slightest degree, the slim, straight figure of Hazel Willis only to find, when he could peer into her face, that the girl was some one whom he had never seen before. Sometimes he would catch the sound of a clear young voice with a charming lilt and he would turn and search breathlessly through the crowd for its owner. But always it was some one who was strange to him. He had written to Eleanor asking Hazel's address. When her answer told him that she herself was ignorant of it and that she addressed her letters to Hazel in care of her professor, he had post haste cabled for the latter's address. To his cable he had received the brief answer that she, Eleanor, was under promise not to reveal it. Atherton felt very much like the poor decapitated ghosts must feel about whom one hears in certain unenlightened localities. He felt that having lost his head he could never again rest until he had found it.

So the autumn came with a little flutter of gay butterfly wings and a scent of the sea and it flitted along through the golden days until the first cutting wind and the too-familiar frost sent the fares of the cabs and motors scurrying away—forgetting to look at the meter or to wait for their change,—impatient to get behind the closed doors of some brilliantly-lighted place where warm air, rich in music and the fragrance of rare exotic flowers, enveloped one and where one did not need to wear furs. Of course furs—the desirable and almost prohibitively expensive kind—were really very becoming. But then they were only the skins of animals and not half so beautiful as the satin skin of the bare white shoulders underneath them.

It was just two days until Christmas. A brother of Atherton's man servant was married and living in a poor quarter of the city. Learning that the man wanted to remember them with gifts, Jim very kindly offered to set both his valet and his valet's parcels down before the brother's door. He had "set them down" and given his chauffeur an address to which he wished to be taken. The big limousine had made its circuitous way through a number of narrow, crooked streets and Jim was just beginning to wonder whether they would ever get to a real thoroughfare again when a tiny bundle of rags and dirt ran from the curbing straight into the path of the big black car.

It all happened and was over so quickly! First there was the tiny mite of humanity running blindly after its rubber ball. Jim remembered afterward that he had sat like one paralyzed and without breath. Then there had been the grinding of brakes and the futile effort on the part of the frightened chauffeur to back up the car. Then like a flash a slender white-sweatered woman had rushed toward the machine. Jim closed his eyes as the figure disappeared beyond his range of vision. He felt suddenly sick. When at last the car had been brought to a stop and he opened the door and stepped to the ground his limbs were trembling from vertigo.

He shrank from seeing the mangled thing that he knew lay under his heavy car. But he could not very well run from it. Besides, he was not the sort of man who allowed his inclinations free rein.

What he saw when he looked about was anything but what he had expected to see.

A small crowd of people had sprung up like mushrooms on the near side of the street, all curiously exhaling a slight unacknowledged feeling of disappointed morbidity. His chauffeur was standing on the other side of the car resting one arm on the long black hood—obviously for support—and listening to something which the white-sweatered woman was saying. In the

arms of the woman was a half civilized piece of dirty humanity—or rather a dirty piece of half civilized humanity.

There were a million noises buzzing around Jim Atherton's ears. The sound of the woman's voice came to him as from a distance, yet something in that voice, indistinct as it was, gripped his heart and made his vision clear and his limbs steady.

In a single bound he was beside the figure in the white sweater. She wore a white veil but through its mesh he saw a pair of dark eyes like which there was not another pair in the world.

"Hazel!"

He leaned eagerly forward and caught the small gloved hand that was patting the youngster's head. The girl stepped back a pace and an angry flash came into her eyes.

"So it was *your* motor that came so near to cutting down a little life! Are not the boulevards which the city so generously provides for those who ride in smart equipages, enough for you? Is there so little chance to slaughter there because all of you ride—leaving no pedestrians for targets—that you come to a section of the city where everybody walks except the teamsters who drive half fed horses? I can't see what else could bring you here. Certainly not your fastidiousness nor your æsthetic love for the beautiful!"

Atherton staggered as from a blow when she started her arraignment, but he stood quietly, with bent head, listening to the end. When she had finished he lifted his head and looked into the angry eyes of the girl he loved.

"That is unfair," he said slowly, the hot blood staining his cheeks which but a moment before had been pale with a sickening fear. "It is not just that you should say those scathing things to me. Never again would I have ridden in an automobile had that little atom been mown down just now."

There stole over the girl, suddenly, a faint apprehension of what it might have meant to this man had she not snatched "that little atom," as he called it, almost from under the hungry wheels of his big motor. Impulsively she thrust out a free hand and immediately it was lost in Jim's two big ones.

"Forgive me. It *was* unfair, but if you lived here as I do and knew these children as I know them you would be a bit anarchistic, too. The streets and that small square—called a park through courtesy—which the world with its millions of acres has forgotten to take away from them, are their playgrounds. It hardly seems fair that those of you to whom the world has been so generous—giving you fine homes and club houses—great estates with wide fertile acres and well kept highways and boulevards—should enter the pitiful preserves of those to whom the world has given so little. Will you forgive me for my tirade?"

A warm, unexpected smile flashed into Hazel's face and Jim Atherton's clasp tightened on the slim gloved hand that was trying for release.

It had begun to snow and with the first few flakes the child in Hazel's arms began to jabber in a foreign tongue and to wriggle like an angleworm. Hazel crooned an unintelligible something into its ear. The wriggling ceased and two crafty eyes—old as the pyramids themselves—looked out of the thin baby face at the beautiful face of the wonderful lady.

"Madonna! My lovely Madonna!" Jim whispered to himself. Aloud he said:

"To sort of recompense the youngster for his fright, if he really felt anything like that, let's take him up town and buy him some Christmas things."

He waited eagerly for Hazel's reply. Had he offered to send a liberal check to the parents of the child Hazel would have refused the offer with contempt—money could not have replaced the little bit of their flesh and blood had the wheels ground out the life of their child

—but the magic words “Christmas things” sent a youthful thrill through her heart. She knew that to most of the families of that neighborhood Christmas meant only a time for giving those things which they needed—a new pair of stockings or mittens for the children—a new imitation flannel or part wool shirt for the father, and a new dish apron for the mother. Already she had emptied her slender purse of the coins earned by teaching English for a few cheap little toys, but the coins had been few and had not gone far.

“Oh,” she cried, “do you suppose we could?”

Jim smiled happily.

“I think no one will try to stop us. Could you go at once? And would you mind being unchaperoned? We could stop at Mrs. Bobbie’s house and take her along.”

At Jim’s suggestion of sharing their anticipated pleasure with somebody else Hazel shook her head vigorously.

“I suppose it will be terribly improper, but I don’t care if it is! I am an American girl. I don’t need a chaperone and if I did John here would be chaperone enough. I’ve ridden miles and miles alone with Brice Mathews and he never ate me up.”

Jim decided at that moment that his old friend Brice Mathews was a fool. Also that he himself was ravenously hungry and might devour where Brice had abstained. Fearing that Hazel might change her mind, he led her hastily toward the open door of the big motor.

The chauffeur with well trained immobility sat in his seat looking dreamily up at the sky, no more perturbed than he would be expected to be if just missing children by a hair’s breadth and then inviting their life savers to go joy riding were a part of every day’s happenings.

The mushroom crowd that had made its sudden appearance on the sidewalk had as suddenly disappeared, feeling that it had been cheated. An accident, now and then, when its victim happened to be some one not near and dear to any of them, was their only diversion and

gave them subject for conversation for many days. Especially did automobile accidents make food for mad chatter and wild gesticulating. Automobiles—to the inhabitants of that neighborhood—stood for all that they had not, and it was on summer evenings when little groups of tired, unkempt men gathered in the square for an hour's smoke and talk that one heard the words—automobiles, oppression and the idle rich closely associated.

"Can't we take one or two of the others? Your car is so roomy and not one of those children at play there in the park has ever been near an automobile except to run out of its way or to wriggle from under its wheels."

"We'll take as many as we can crowd into the space that is not already occupied with machinery, lamps and leather cushions. Call your gang, dear." The last word Jim wisely said under his breath.

Hazel held out to Jim her little bundle of childhood.

"Take him a moment, please."

For just an instant Jim hesitated and his stomach did a slight acrobatic stunt. But before Hazel had noticed his hesitancy he held out his arms and allowed her to place a fighting youngster in them who obviously did not like his looks and who immediately set about making that fact perfectly clear. He wriggled and yelled and scratched and bit, but Jim hung on to the squirming little body as if his very life depended upon it. Once during the battle Atherton's finger inadvertently got into the yelling mouth. Instantly two rows of sharp teeth shut down upon it like a merciless vise. If there lived anybody who had ever thought Jim Atherton anything but a hero he should have seen him trying to pry those teeth apart with tenderest persuasion and eloquence. If he had any desire to swear he was conscientious enough to forego that pleasure when he recalled that children should not be permitted to hear swear words.

Hazel had run into the square to get her "gang," as

he had called it and he feared that unless she returned pretty quickly she would find his gored body lying on the ground with this vicious young Napoleon sitting astride it. He thought once of calling to his chauffeur for help, but to whom, pray, can a man hope to be a hero if not to his servants? So he fought his battle alone and valiantly. He wished that his aching finger might choke the enemy and then he was ashamed for having wished it.

"Why, Mr. Atherton, how awkwardly you are holding that child!"

Hazel had at last approached with a half dozen street gamins at her heels. "You should learn to be tender with children, Mr. Atherton. Poor little John. Did nasty man hurt you?" Instantly two grimy hands relaxed their hold on Jim's hair. The mouth opened to smile—if its grimace could be called that—and Atherton hurriedly extracted his finger from its depths.

"I confess I've never been nurse maid before. I might add," he went on—rubbing his finger gently, "that I have absolutely no desire to be one again."

"There is just one type of man that I would not trust," said Hazel, as she shook her head reproachfully, "and that is the man who does not like children, Mr. Atherton."

For a second Jim was perilously near to offering to hold again the child who now stood on the ground pulling at Hazel's skirt. But wisdom outbalanced impulse.

The journey up town was not one which many men would have enjoyed. A dozen animated feet were climbing excitedly over the two grown-up occupants of the limousine and occasionally digging them in the ribs or barely grazing their heads. A dozen grimy, sticky hands were dislocating their various articles of wearing apparel and leaving streaks and finger prints on the small plate glass windows that would have delighted the heart of a Bertillon expert. But Jim Atherton thought he had never enjoyed a ride so much.

Beside him sat the girl he loved, smiling happily

up at him when a lull in the scrambling of the numerous arms and feet made it safe for her to cease for a moment the fight for self-preservation. He could feast his hungry eyes upon her piquant face. He could occasionally hear the sweet cadences of her voice when for a second the babble of the little foreign tongues abated. He could feel the magnetism of her slender, vibrant body and once when the tiny, vicious hands of the little piece of civilization's débris which had so nearly wrecked himself caught like animal claws at the soft black locks of hair that had escaped the confines of Hazel's small street hat and fallen into maddening confusion about her white brow and delicately flushed cheeks, he had bent forward and endeavored to loosen the clutch of the wiry baby fingers. The little hands had tangled themselves almost hopelessly in the raven curls. The hair itself felt like clinging skeins of finest silk in his trembling fingers. The faint, elusive fragrance of it went to his head and made him dizzy. Her warm breath against his hand was a thing so intimate that his heart pounded until he thought she must surely hear it.

"If I can only remove my hat perhaps you can get at him better."

Hazel raised her arms and drew out the hatpins and Jim lifted the smart little hat from her head.

"Oh! Oh! Johnny! Johnny, you're hurting me!"

Jim contemplated the spot, on that mite of humanity, where whippings are supposed to do the most good and his fingers itched. But wisely he restrained his desire for vengeance and with what patience he could command at the moment he loosed the grimy little hands, after which he basked in Hazel's broken, interrupted smiles and her sweet words of thanks and admiration for his patience and his beautiful tenderness with children! They had almost reached the big toy shop which was their destination when one of the older children accidentally jabbed Jim with one of the hatpins which Hazel had been unable to find when she had replaced

her hat on the glorious coil of hair. At that identical instant Jim Atherton joined the ranks of those who fight to abolish immigration.

Before entering the shop Hazel lined up her protégés and carefully joined their hands. When the chain was complete she and Jim took it through the great doors to the wonders on the other side of them,—she at the head of the chain and Jim at the rear end of it. There were no shrieks of delight as they had expected. The pinched, wan little faces were awe-stricken. The wide, half wild eyes were round with astonished wonder. There was no mad rushing of youthful feet which would leave in their wake devastation and destruction. The shabbily shod little members shambled and halted.

On the long counters—miles long to their excited fancy—and on the countless shelves—there seemed to be millions of them—were heaped innumerable toys the like of which those children of the proletariats had never even dreamed. There were whole regiments of tin soldiers of various sizes, all very brave in their brightly painted suits. There were red wagons and gray hobby-horses with flowing manes and tails. There were dolls and doll beds that would have coaxed the last sou from the savings bank of any youthful financier who happened to be of the doll worshipping sex. And the guns! Big guns and little guns, bean guns and pop guns, air guns and guns that shot real leaden pellets. Then there were cannons. Cannons to right of them, cannons to left of them, cannons before them volleyed and thundered—whenever a demonstrating sales-person happened to be behind them.

"I wana bomb! *I wana a bomb!*" suddenly screamed a little sallow faced boy next to Jim.

Hazel turned a half-frightened, half-pitying face to Jim's bewildered one.

"Poor child! It is a part of their training in many of the homes where live babies like these. Isn't it terrible?"

"That doesn't half describe it. Why, the young anarchist! Poor little chap! I suppose some day he'll draw the card with the skull and cross bones on it. Then he'll go out and do his nasty job without a murmur and when it is all over, his kind will speak his name with a soft, idolatrous whisper which that kind always use when handling the name of one of their chosen martyrs!"

"Oh, if you only knew the horrible things I hear!"

For a brief instant Hazel closed her eyes and a shudder ran over her body.

"I am doing what I can to help those with whom I come in contact in that neighborhood which we have just left. But it is hard to make them trust me. They are naturally as suspicious as felines. A few, however, have come to believe in me and perhaps I can yet do a little good."

Atherton wondered that anybody who lived could help believing in the girl who was patting the head of the baby anarchist and looking at him through swimming eyes. He did not believe in war. But if Hazel were a Joan of Arc he would be the first man to shoulder a gun and to follow her into the thickest, smokiest, bloodiest battle that ever was fought. Whatever were her principles they were *right* principles to him. Whatever was her creed there could be no other creed for him. This olive skinned girl, who looked so much like his little girl that was dead, the little girl who had belonged to him for one brief twenty-four hours and who had smiled into his face with an honesty and candor which had been new and strange to him,—this girl, who through choice lived in the center of a hive of proletariats and worse, was a being divine to the man whose pleasure-loving world made a god of luxury.

"Do you think—that is——" he stammered and colored like a boy in his first long pants—"I might be able to help you with them some way if you'd let me?"

Hazel's heart sprang to her throat. Could it be that he *was* different—that her instinctive belief in him was

not without foundation? Oh, if it could only be! She longed passionately—without knowing why—that this man, to whom she believed she had belonged, should be different from that gay world, a sample of which he had brought to her home on that day, long ago. Just what she meant by “different” she had never explained to herself. She had heard unflattering things about him at times when she had been unable to escape the venomous tongue of Winifred Blake. But though the things reached her brain something kept them out of her heart. When thoughts of him came to her through the day she banished them with a little impatience and a great deal of wonder. But when at night he stood with her beside her devastated rosebush and smiled at her and allowed Tige to push his cold nose into his hand, ah!—it was then that she knew him as she felt no one else in the wide world knew him, and that knowing him made her lonely heart sing.

“Could you—would you—care to help?” Unconsciously she held her breath until his answer came.

The man’s face was alive with eagerness and his voice was low and intense.

“I want to do what you do, always. I—I would go through a whole regiment of anarchists with lighted bombs to be near you.”

Hazel began breathing with a long sigh and the light went slowly out of her face. Silently she stooped and pressed a warm cheek against the dark head of a child who was tugging at her skirts.

“Hazel, can’t you see,—don’t you know that you are all the world to me? That I would write a check for my every penny and give it to those whom you are trying to help if you wished me to do it. I——”

“The kind of help which I could use down there must come from the soul and be born of no other desire than the desire to be of service to that part of humanity which is less fortunate than we.”

“But, Hazel——”

"It is getting late, Mr. Atherton. Yes, Michael, we'll get one of those dolls for sister and maybe it will make her well."

A pair of moody eyes looking up at her brightened as if a match had been lighted behind them.

"You see, Mr. Atherton, people of this class, even the babies, are lacking in selfishness. Little Anthony, there, whispered to me just now that he was sure his mother would love that tiny iron, as those which she uses must be terribly heavy for her! Josef wishes that he might take home one of those red wagons for his father to haul the baby in at night and on Sundays! Josef thinks that the baby must be a burden to his father's arms at night when they are tired from a long day's work in the sewer."

Jim Atherton was learning a lesson, the learning of which hurt. He hung his head in wounded love and shame.

"Will you help me, then, as you are helping them, Hazel? I, too, am in need of enlightenment. I'm not naturally selfish. I've never been made to think of anything else than my own pampered self and it is small wonder if I am not interested in the welfare of the unfortunates. I have always given money in the satisfied belief that I was charitable. I see now that these people need other things besides money. I'm a sort of heathen who, calling himself a Christian, makes food for the scavengers of Christianity. I once read a very interesting article, albeit a cutting one, which said that a certain class—and that class was so graphically described that if one happened to be a member of it he instantly recognized the membership—was Christianity *putrified* and that atheists and infidels pointed the finger of scorn at Christianity because of the stench of that class whose members managed to fool everybody else, themselves included. Are you willing to help me out of that class?"

Hazel looked into his eyes searchingly.

"If I thought that you were not sincere——"

"But I am. I am. *Please!*"

"Very well. Your first lesson shall be to-night. You shall sit with me in the shabby front room of Mrs. Gonzolas's sorrowing home and see to it that the many cardies flickering around a cheap, imitation mahogany casket are kept burning. Mr. Gonzolas has gone to where he won't get the usual flannel shirt on Christmas."

Jim could not suppress a shudder.

"Do you mean that you are in the habit of sitting with the dead of those foreigners down there?"

"It isn't a habit yet, Mr. Atherton. But it may grow into one. You see, I sit with their dead only part of the night when I happen to know that the family and their friends are already worn out with past nights of watching and days of working. Usually I am relieved at midnight by somebody who has slept the earlier part of the night. It is too bad that the Grim Reaper cannot confine his calls on the poor to the summer months. It would be much cheaper for those who are left. When illness comes in the winter it means that more fuel must be consumed because the doctors always order a more livable temperature. Fuel costs a great deal in the winter. Then more carriages must be provided. In the summer months many of the mourners walk to the cemetery, but walking is less good in cold weather. Oh, sometimes I——"

She broke off abruptly and turned to one of the toy-laden counters. Jim laboriously extracted a sniffing little chap from between his feet and set him gently upon his own, which were shod in a cast-off pair of woman's shoes that were miles too big for him and which flapped loosely about the pipestem legs. Then he hastened to Hazel's side with authoritative words trembling on his lips. He did not like the idea of this beautiful being whom he loved rubbing shoulders with all sorts of people, even dead ones, and he meant to tell her so.

"I want a half dozen of the loudest drums you have," Hazel was saying to the salesman as Jim approached.

The man laughed raucously.

"We have that many of a make which has been discontinued because of complaints from insane asylums that they were already too well filled."

Again the salesman laughed and his narrow pig eyes looked with bold familiarity into the girl's face. Jim's fingers itched and his face darkened, but he had yet to learn how well this girl from his own country could take care of herself.

"That is too bad." Hazel answered in the man's native tongue. "Have you made application to all of them? I should think that your employer would find a vacancy in one of them for you since it was he who made you handle those terrible drums."

Jim chuckled appreciatively. Her words recalled the quick unexpected thrusts which had fallen on the surprised heads of his friends that day in the long ago when a dark eyed girl, so like this one here, had stood bare-headed beside her scraggly dog and shot hot defiance at a small crowd of self-invited guests and sent their own thrusts flying like boomerangs back into their faces.

An hour later the big limousine wound its way back to the little square from which it had started. Amid eager squeals and happy shouts of the children, the numerous parcels were carried to houses where surprised women, with sallow faces and much mended garments, looked fondly at Hazel and suspiciously at Jim.

CHAPTER XV

M^Y *Dear Family:*

"You are my family, you know. You told me in one of your earliest letters that, since I seemed to grieve because of my lack of family, you would consent to being that requisite. I do hope you are not tired of the job. Sometimes I pretend that you are my brother and sometimes that you are my cousin or uncle and once I pretended that you were my husband—I didn't like that much, though. You were not a bit romantic or sentimental and occasionally you even bellowed at me. You called me your 'little girl' when you should have said 'My beautiful queen' or something like that. I think I like you best as a sort of composite family.

"Eleanor hasn't answered my last letter, but I know how she hates letter writing, so I don't mind.

"My New York paper came yesterday and I sat up half the night reading it. I always find the 'Birth, Marriage and Death' columns the most interesting part of the papers. I'm like the old lady who said that she liked to read that section of a newspaper to see if she knew any of those who had just been born, married or died. I guess those three events are equally important and that that is the reason they are always under one heading. They're all rather creepy and solemn, aren't they?

"The calendar on my desk says it is February, but the noises that come up to me from the street below say that it is spring. There are shrill screams and laughter of children at play. Hucksters are announcing loudly that they have green vegetables for sale. A hurdy-gurdy is playing 'To-night on the Old Mississippi'—a real

American ragtime song. Even the hoof beats of horses on the pavement sounds summery. A couple of sparrows are quarreling on my window sill over the bread crumbs I have put there for them.

"The thermometer outside my window is registering fifty-eight degrees. It IS spring, if only for a day! And I want to go out and run and run and run and then come back and sit down on the sunny side of the building and lean my back against the warm brick wall.

"The hurdy-gurdy's music has gotten into my feet. Between sentences I've danced across the room and back and as I write I pat one foot and hum. Thank goodness there are no troublesome tonsils in my feet! Those in my throat suffice for my entire body. Isn't it a shame that necks can't be amputated?

"Yesterday I took a holiday, that is, I played hookey. I have had a lovely new gown—any dress costing more than the price of gingham is always called a gown—hanging in my closet for a week just worrying me to death with temptation. At last I could stand its importunities no longer. I swathed myself in its gorgeous folds, put on my very newest hat and hied me forth in all my splendor.

"I walked down the Avenue de l'Opéra and the chauffeur of nearly every taxicab I passed touched his cap and asked:

"'Auto-taxi, Mademoiselle?'

"Now, when cab men and chauffeurs ask a woman if she wishes the service of a smart conveyance, that woman knows that she is dressed correctly and looking prosperous even if there is not a sou in her purse! Cab men, chauffeurs and waiters are wonderful judges of clothes. They know the expensive kind when they see them, and, although they are perfectly aware that expensive clothing is no proof of wealth, they know that it is proof of an extravagant hand from which the francs slip with unconcerned ease.

"All of which, I hope, does not convince you of my

extravagance. The gown which so thoroughly deceived those good men was not at all expensive, but I pretend that it is. It makes me feel so much more dressed up. The lady with whom I live used to sew for very smart people in New York and between us we made a really stunning creation.

"I am so sorry for that lady and her family. They were entirely forgotten when this world's treasurer was dividing up the dividends of the good things in which everybody was supposed to share. I guess when he called they must all have been so busy working that they didn't hear him knock. Anyhow, if he'd been a Socialist he would have left their share on their front doorstep, but evidently he was a Royalist.

"What are you, Big Man? That is, what political party do you favor? I'm a Socialist. I'm almost on the borderline of anarchism. I made a speech to a big crowd last Saturday night in a lodge hall. Really I did. I believe in individual liberty. Why then should I not talk to these poor people who believe in it too? They are radical almost to lawlessness and if I can make better citizens of them because I understand them and their beliefs—if I can make them a bit less radical—why should I not do it?

"Jim Atherton is doing the best he can to make himself intolerable by trying to interfere with my association with the people of this neighborhood. He seems to think that I might be contaminated. I told him the other day that if his class had failed to contaminate me that that should be proof that I was immune. (If I had had any more 'thats' I'd have put them in that last sentence.)

"I am sorry he wrote you and Eleanor about the incident which brought about our meeting. He is inclined to make a heroine of me just because of the fact that I didn't allow a baby to mess up the wheels of his limousine with its legs and arms and ragged clothes and because I pulled a woman out of the water when she said

'Glub, glub' to me. Who was it that told you that I was a rather difficult person to lionize? I'll bet it was Eve Norton. I had to tell her one day to please not gush over me or I'd be tempted to take Winifred Blaine to the nearest watering trough and drown her.

"I can't write any more to-day. I just glanced up and caught a glimpse of a picture which hangs over my desk. It always makes me gnash my teeth and want to snap at something. I have been sorely tempted to remove it from its place of vantage and throw it out of the window, but as that might offend the poor patriotic lady with whom I live and to whom it belongs I have thus far left it untouched.

"The picture is entitled 'A Soldier's Farewell,' and depicts a homely room in which the most brilliant colors riot from the rag carpet on the floor to the gay paper on the walls and ceiling. A fond, weeping—I should say a fondly weeping—woman who is evidently the mother is bidding her son farewell. No one but a mother would be crying at his departure, anybody less blind would be handing him his hat and asking him what was his hurry. The man wears a blue uniform—my landlady imported this picture from America—and a look that the artist did his best to make brave and soldierly. He has his arm around the mother's waist and you can almost—if you are not in possession of all your faculties—hear the clank of his sword as it touches the table against which he is leaning—I've always been sure that his knees were a bit uncertain and that without that table the artist never could have made a soldier of him at all. A little sister stands near—not that she has any vital part in the picture but because lithograph dealers can get twenty-five cents more for a 'A Soldier's Farewell' if he has *several* relatives to weep over him. The price is so much a weep or so much a farewell.

"There is a clock on the wall the hands of which point to twelve. A yellow streak from a window which is supposed to be a sunbeam is in reality a calumny. A portrait

on the wall, over which a flag of the United States is draped, hanging in festoons from between two crossed swords, one instinctively knows is the picture of *father* as one also knows by that same instinct that the original of that portrait was a member of the G. A. R.

"That picture would not antagonize me so if only something happened in it once in a while. If the calumnious sunbeam would leave off sunbeaming. If the clock would speed up and point for a few months to twelve-fifteen or the soldier would shift his position and allow the foot on which he has always stood, to rest a while. If only the little girl would bat an eye or the mother stop wiping hers.

"That picture is on my nerves and I can't help wishing that that soldier would hurry up and finish his farewell so that he could go off to his war and get shot.

"Your wicked

"JEAN."

Hazel folded the letter, placed it in an envelope and addressed it to Allen Hamilton.

"I AM a wicked little animal, but I can't help it. He hasn't any right to keep doing his old farewell in my room." She crinkled her nose at the lithograph above her desk. Suddenly, with one of her quick bird-like movements, she drew a long-stemmed violet from a glass bowl at her elbow, and slipped it, too, into the envelope. After sealing it she smoothed back her dark, waving hair, pinned on a brown street hat and slid into a brown tailored coat and went toward her door. She paused there an instant, her hand on the old-fashioned white knob, and looked back at the picture which still hung with a monotonous sameness on the wall in front of her plain oak desk.

"Some day I'm going to cut you all up into tiny pieces and cremate you. Or if ever I find that I have an enemy I may send you to him with my compliments." Then Hazel Willis did a very un-grown-up thing. She stuck

out a very red, very pointed, tongue at the family group in the lithograph.

She hummed a gay little air as she walked lightly down the street. On days like this she seemed to fly—or to float, rather than to walk. There was a song in her feet as well as in her lovely young face and on her lips. It was a wonderful world after all and God's sunshine was gold for which her beloved poor did not have to work. She was a sun worshipper, this young pagan, and when the sun shone her song was always a pæan. She was a wonderful mixture of paganism and superlative civilization. She believed in God and the Bible as she believed in life. She had never outgrown the prayers learned at her sainted mother's knee and belief in them was as deep-rooted as the veins in her body. She was remarkably innocent and pure of mind and had a faith that questioned nothing. Yet with all those things she was a pagan. She loved all beauty with a perfect passion. She could wander for hours through galleries where priceless paintings were exhibited or become intoxicated with the beauty of shimmering silks or glittering jewels in fashionable shops. The fragrance of flowers was like opium to her. It made her dream fantastic dreams of sandal-shod women reclining on beds of roses while men like Mark Antony knelt near. A chord from a pipe organ made her whisper a prayer, while a wild rhapsody from a street player's violin made her feet go mad with rhythm. Then with all that, she was uncannily intellectual and well informed. The intelligence had been natural. The development of it had begun with the teachings of her mother and had been continued by M. Dupont and his musty old books.

At the entrance to the square she met Jim Atherton. She elevated her delicate eyebrows with well-feigned surprise.

"Bon jour, mon cher ami. But you are far from home."

"Yes." Jim smiled what he fondly hoped was an aston-

ished smile. He wanted to let her know that she was the last person in all the world whom he had expected to see that day near the square. But, poor Jim! His smile only succeeded in letting Hazel know how delighted this handsome specimen of manhood was to see her.

"You see, I've a little business that brings me here to-day. Awfully glad to meet you so unexpectedly," Jim went on. Then the two young hypocrites sauntered to the nearest bench and sat down, quite forgetting to ask the usual question of whether the one or the other had the time to spare for a moment's chat.

Atherton had come to that neighborhood at first only when Hazel had telephoned him that he could be of service to some one of her numerous destitute families. He feared that coming uninvited might hurt his cause. But after a time he took to haunting the little square with the hope of meeting, or at least seeing, this young goddess who lived with the proletariats. For a week past he had not only seen but had managed to meet Hazel each day on her way to M. Dupont's, a block distant, and Hazel had found that the far side of the street—the side on which was the park—was the sunny side. As she preferred to walk in the sunshine, what more natural than that she should always cross over to the park side of the thoroughfare? Jim was always at the entrance to the square.

"Did you bring the peanuts? I—that is—I mean, do you happen to have any peanuts with you? I love to feed the hungry little sparrows and pigeons." Hazel's cheeks burned at the slip of speech, but neither of them smiled.

With all the sang-froid of a perfectly innocent gentleman, Jim drew a well-filled paper bag from his pocket and emptied some peanuts from it into her lap.

"You see I never forget them—er—I mean I, too, always like to feed the birds when I come near this little square. Pretty soon it will be spring and the grass will come up, if there is any spot in it where busy little feet

will not hammer it down faster than nature can send it up, and then the worms and insects will be more easily found and the birds won't need the peanuts. I've thought of something they will need, though, and I'm going to see that they have it."

Hazel paused in the shelling of a peanut and looked eagerly up into his face. Jim's head went dizzy, it was so perilously near the sweet-scented hair.

"What is it—Mr. Atherton?"

"You were going to say Jim."

"What makes you think so?" Hazel's cheeks were a warm pink.

"Because my hearing is very acute and I heard you sound the first letter."

"And if I was?" She was not looking at him now but her voice was defiant.

Jim hesitated. They were nearing forbidden ground. He had gained so much since that day nearly two months ago when he had accidentally found her. There was a camaraderie existing between them now which sometimes tottered and Jim told himself that he would want to die if it ever fell. So he looked at the peach bloom of the averted cheek and ventured cautiously:

"Well, if you were—why didn't you?"

"Because——"

"Yes," Jim prompted, his heart pounding.

"Because I—you—we are not being any too proper and conventional as it is and——" Hazel began to laugh suddenly and turning her head, looked shyly up at him.

He wanted to pick her up in his arms and carry her to the limousine, which waited just around the corner for him, and to tell his chauffeur to drive them to the nearest minister. Instead he smiled down into her velvety eyes and said:

"You say that you believe in individual liberty. Chap-erones are halters of a silly conventionality. We are friends. We meet and discuss things of mutual interest. There can be no wrong in that."

"No. That is just what I told Carryl Langley, when I ran across him up town yesterday. He said he was over on important business. Returning to America again next week. We had a lemonade together. He asked me if I would let him take me to a theater to-night if he would bring along a chaperone. I told him he might bring the chaperone if he liked or he might not bring her, that I would love to go with him and that I didn't need a chaperone to make me sit still or to keep me from sticking my finger in his eye or scratching him and that if I thought *he* was of the kind who needed one I wouldn't be consenting to go."

Jim's face had grown very grave and a frown corrugated his brow.

"You are not really going alone to a theater with Carryl Langley, are you?"

"Why, of course. You yourself just said that chaperones were an unnecessary quantity."

"But I meant under certain conditions."

Hazel's eyes twinkled.

"Oh, you men! Anything is all right if it happens to be shared with the one who propounds the theory. Rules and regulations are for everybody but the man in question."

Jim flushed. If she did not think so rapidly he might hope to win an argument with her occasionally. Her answers were fired with an infallible, unerring aim that hit the bull's-eye of his side of the discussion every time.

"Perhaps you are right, but if one does or does not follow a rule, why not always continue to follow or not to follow the same rule?"

"Relevant to what is that last statement?" Hazel parried.

"Relevant to the fact," Jim held her eyes determinedly, "that you call one friend by his given name and refuse to so honor another friend whom you know very much better."

Hazel tried to look away, but his eyes held hers. She crushed the shell of the nut with her fingers.

"I have friends who have never *asked* me to call them by anything but their surnames."

Jim's breath was coming fast. Each step gained with this most wonderful of women was an accomplishment, a victory that brought him nearer to his heart's desire.

"I ask you now. Will you call me Jim?"

For some unexplainable reason Hazel's eyes grew moist. With an effort she turned her eyes away and looked out across the barren square. But what she really continued to see was the lean, handsome face of a very serious man. A lock of brown hair, in which were glints of gold, fell unheeded over one white, blue-veined temple. Wide, beautifully shaped eyes of bluest blue looked deep into the very heart of her.

Men had made both passive and violent love to this girl in the brief space of her womanhood, but there was none of the blatant insincerity in the voice or face of *this* man which she had been quick to detect in some of the others.

"If you wish me to. Yes." Jim had to lean forward to catch the low reply.

"Thanks," said he simply.

"And now," Hazel cried with an air of one who has just disposed of something unpleasant, "what were you going to tell me about—the something which you said the birds would need in the summer?"

"Water. Ever since that time you told me about the pathetic way the birds hover disappointedly around that dry fountain in the summer I've been revolving a plan to make that fountain live again."

"Oh, do you think that we could?" Hazel's face lighted with enthusiasm and unconsciously she said "we" instead of "you."

"Why not? Already I have a famous sculptor working on a new fountain that is to have little drinking places for the children and higher ones for adults. The

one thing to make it more beautiful than any other fountain in the world would be to have you for the model of the sea nymph."

"Mr. Atherton, you——"

"I beg pardon for interrupting,—but you mean, Jim, don't you?"

"Yes. Jim, I could not be that, but you can't know how glad I am that you are giving this thing." She spoke his name softly like a child who is just learning a new word of the pronunciation of which it is not sure.

"Are you so glad, Hazel?"

He hesitated before her name, then spoke it slowly, lingering on it with all an ardent man's tenderness. Her eyelids drooped, but she put out her hand impulsively.

"I am glad because of the gift to the poor and the birds. But I am more glad because you yourself thought of it. It proves your interest." She paused; then, withdrawing her hand from his tense clasp, she smiled a shy little smile into his eager face and added the single word—

"Jim!"

Life had been very good to Jim Atherton. Born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, he had grown to manhood under Dame Fortune's protecting wing. She made him the receiving teller in her bank, and he had raked in the good things in a matter-of-fact way, accepting all that the gods had to offer as his due. He had never given his good fortune a thought. Hence gratitude was a thing alien to him until that moment when the girl whom he loved first called him "Jim."

It was a day in early spring, but it was a Thanksgiving Day to him. Something new and strange and sweet was in his heart, something that had never before been there. He wondered vaguely why he had never until to-day seen the beauty in a naked, slumbering tree. Why he had never before noticed the gorgeous blue of the sky and the soft fleeciness of the feathery clouds! Why should the gods have brought him their stores, making

for him a life of ease and luxury while the man on that wagon worked and lacked every comfort? Why should the rubber-tired wheels of an automobile carry him over streets which were cleaned by men perhaps better than he. Gratitude—a heretofore unknown emotion—flooded his soul.

He walked with Hazel as far as the door of the building in which was M. Dupont's studio. He was never permitted to visit the big room under the roof. Then he went slowly back to the square and, seating himself on the same bench, gave himself up to dreams.

When Hazel burst into the studio, a mad little song on her lips, the old professor turned from the window with a start. There was a note in the girl's voice that had never been there before. It was a note of happiness—a certain kind of happiness—that comes once to most of us and can never be duplicated nor imitated once it deserts us.

"Ah! But it is a glorious day, mon ami!"

Hazel danced across the floor, blowing a kiss from her fingertips to the old man advancing toward her. Gently M. Dupont took the girl's flushed face between the soft palms of his withered old hands and searchingly gazed into her shining eyes.

"What has happened to my little humming bird?"

"Happened? Nothing has happened, monsieur, except that spring has come."

"Perhaps I should have said, 'Who has happened.' Is it that nice young countryman of yours, ma petite amie?"

"You weird old darling! How you do get to the bottom of things! Do you always know every time I sigh or smile, every time I contemplate annihilating some selfish old money-bags as well as every time I feel angelic? Do you have a round crystal ball, into which you gaze and in which you can follow my every movement, also my galloping and ever-changing emotions?"

"Your eyes reflect all that goes on in your soul, ma chère. You have not yet learned to mask them, and God

grant that you never will. Why should we guard our emotions so carefully? Why hide that which we should be proud to show? I look into a great many eyes on the crowded streets, but I see in them very few souls; they are windows of dark, mysterious cellars." The professor tipped back the girl's dark head. "What has brought you this new happiness?"

"Oh, monsieur, you, too, will be glad when you know. I have just seen Mr. Atherton and—what do you think he is doing? He is having a new fountain made for our square. It is to be his gift to our poor and our birds!"

The old man's face lighted with sudden joy. Ah! how grand that would be! It was small wonder that his young pupil was so happy and yet—and yet—M. Dupont knew that the new fountain had not put that flush on that olive skin, which was usually a pale old ivory, nor that new note in the fresh young voice. Hazel might successfully deceive herself, but she could not deceive this fond old man into whose heart she had grown so securely.

Abruptly he dropped his hands and moved toward the piano that filled one shadowed corner of the room.

"Will you sing 'Au Printemps' for me, ma chère?"

Hazel assented. Removing her hat, she came and stood beside the master, whose body was swaying with the rhythm of the music pouring from beneath his long thin fingers. She took the note he sounded for her and allowed the song to slip from her young throat and fill the big old room.

When she had finished the master continued to sit, his fingers resting on the notes last struck, staring with unseeing eyes at the yellowed keys. Hazel knew his moods, and out of respect for his silence she, too, did not stir. Finally the old man sighed and turned about in his seat.

"You may write Mr. Hamilton that you can make your début in New York this fall. You have almost all that I have to give. A few months more and there will be nothing that old M. Dupont can add to your voice."

Hazel made a little gasping sound with the quick intake of her breath. Then two impulsive arms were thrown with rough, boyish tenderness about the master's neck.

So soon! It was to be so soon! The end for which she had worked so hard, for which Allen Hamilton had so generously paid, was in sight. Thank God! Thank God!

She looked at the old man through glistening tears, those little floods that came to her eyes always when she was greatly moved, but which rarely overflowed.

"Now, at last, you will surely tell me about my voice," she cried. "What will that *début* mean for me and for the man who is anxiously awaiting it?"

M. Dupont passed an unsteady hand across his brow.

"How can I tell? I really haven't the crystal ball which you accused me of having. We can only wait and see—wait and see."

Hazel's face clouded. She longed so to know the secret of her voice. Was it good, bad or indifferent. It might be either, the first or the last, but surely if it were the other kind, less money and less time would have been spent on it. She felt that this little white-haired man knew, that he *must* know, and his evasion of her oft-repeated question puzzled her.

As he said, she must wait and see, wait and see.

CHAPTER XVI

SCIENCE tells us that the worms which will one day destroy these temples in which we live are within us from the beginning.

That is a most unpleasant thought, but science is not always considerate of our nerves or sentiments. It digs up some hideous fact and slams it at us without waiting for an invitation to do so, and when we shake it off we find it has left its mark. Before science discovered that we were possessed of appendixes we went happily along our various ways and there was no especial inducement for men to take up surgery as a profession, and those who already were surgeons did odd jobs at carpentry or anything else where their tools could be made to pay for themselves. Then, bang! Science discovered the appendix and wanted to cut it out. But we did not care a rap about what science said, and anyway we did not believe "in the knife." So we refused to have appendicitis and went on dying with "inflammation of the bowels." It took a good many years to convert us to appendicitis, but when once we were converted we went to it with a gusto and loving enthusiasm. We were quick to take it to our hearts—or, to be more exact, to our stomachs—once we were convinced, but we were so slow about being convinced that by the time we had accepted appendicitis science had discovered a great many more new things to hurl at us. We were like a very small town where I once visited—because I could not help it. It was so slow to accept things that the people following the styles of the last decade were in the style of the moment. They were so far behind, that fashion, running its whole gamut, doubled back on its track and overtook them. The slang of the outside world never reached

that little town until years after it had been entered in "Webster's Unabridged" as good English.

But to return to the germ that waits within us for the time when it can destroy us!

Winifred Blaine as Winifred Blake had nourished and fed the thing that was her soul's parasite. Always she had been conscious of it, but never with a regretting consciousness. She might have fought it, but she had no desire to rid herself of it. Like Cleopatra, she kept her asp with her, allowing it to grow into a horrible power, knowing perfectly well that it was only waiting a chance to sting her in a vulnerable spot.

She was jealous,—jealous of anybody who happened to have something which she had not and for which she wished; jealous of anything animate or inanimate, animal or human, that received more admiration from her fellow men than she; jealous of women who were younger than she; jealous of their freshness and youth; jealous of women older than she because they had more experience and wisdom. She had fostered jealousy until it had made her soul shrink and her heart become caloused. Then, too, she never hesitated to step on a thing if it stood in her way, and she could do it always with a most engaging smile that was very disarming.

When she married the Mummy she took his name and his millions with a charming imitation of love, and she had never allowed that imitation to seem less real. Some women marry for money, and when they begin to pay the price they get stage fright, and immediately the audience is disillusioned. A faint-hearted pickpocket is easily caught because his fingers fumble, but one who is hardened to the thing can slip his nimble fingers into the pocket of a man from Scotland Yard, and the man is none the wiser.

Winifred could be very charming when she chose, which was almost always, and the Mummy, whose nature had been molded in the same mold that had shaped the nature of his wife, preened himself with a great deal

of satisfaction because he had won so lovely a prize. It fed his already overfat vanity and justified his self-appreciation. Then he began to slip back into his loose habits, but his wife was no better behind the footlights of life than he, and he could come to her fresh from the arms of a gay chorus girl—who would have done well to take lessons in acting from him—with the tenderest smile on his lying lips. So it was a fair game that they played. The players were perfectly matched. In their youth they both had had illusions and innocence, which bore in them beautiful things. But with the death of illusions and innocence the beautiful things had faded and gone. They were invited everywhere. They went everywhere, but,—not often together. Winifred had wit and beauty. The Mummy had gold. It was a splendid combination. Those who at the wedding had predicted incompatibility looked on, as year after year went by, and wondered.

They lived in a house of crumbling, disintegrating ideals,—in an atmosphere of degenerated ambitions and hopes, of dissimulation and deception. The germs of dead sentiments and dying faith perched on their lips when they kissed, clung to their hands when they touched and sat in their hearts when they called each other endearing names. The ghosts of dead passions looked from their eyes when their lips smiled the lie of joy. Each knew that the other wore a mask, but neither tried to see the real being behind the disguise. It is possible that they shrank from seeing the things which the lifting of the masks might reveal. Or perhaps they were content to go on as they were,—masquerading, each pretending that all was as it should be, until the inevitable hour of unmasking came, the not-to-be-escaped hour of reckoning.

It may be that they even felt the confessor who stalked silently, invisibly between them,—the confessor who was also the collector to whom they owed toll, who would one day hear the shameful things they would tell. He

was there—always there, waiting,—grimly, patiently, waiting for the hour when their souls would have to pay their debts,—waiting for the hour when the possessors of those souls would have become inoculated with the germs which they had made no effort to exterminate, when they would turn like panicstricken lepers to him and pour out their futile regrets and pitiful remorse. But if Edward Blaine and his wife were conscious of that stalking thing's presence,—the thing that would some day write *Finis* to the lives they now lived—neither gave any sign of it.

Winifred wondered if Jim Atherton had gone on another hunting trip to the wilds of Africa. She expected no direct word from him, but when she found herself unable to get word either from or of him indirectly she was annoyed and unhappy, and though she still smiled her most winning and, as Carryl Langley expressed it, her most "deadly smile," she left fumes of venom wherever she went.

It was she who repeated Mrs. Rex Burns' "whisper" to Billy Norton. Carryl Langley had loved Billy's wife before Billy himself had discovered that she was the one woman in all the world for him. Everybody belonging to their particular world knew that Carryl Langley had gone heartbroken to foreign parts the day Eve refused him and accepted Billy. When Langley returned Madam Grundy was busy with the affairs of somebody else, and Langley and the Billy Nortons were permitted to form a new alliance. Langley had never referred to the past, and both Billy and Eve, respecting him for his reticence and sorry for the change that had come over him, took him into their generous young hearts and gradually he became a sort of brother in their home.

Everything ran in smooth channels until people began seeing Eve too often alone with Langley,—sometimes in out-of-the-way roadhouses where they had stopped Langley's car for a sandwich and pot of tea, sometimes in downtown restaurants where Langley leaned too far

across the table and Eve smiled too dangerously. Then had come that night when Eve had dropped a crumpled little note in the conservatory of Eleanor Rollins' home. She had danced two dances when she missed it and went hastily in search of it. She had not found it for the very good reason that it was at that moment reposing under a bit of lace on the ample bosom of Mrs. Rex Burns.

It was a dinner dance at which Eleanor was hostess that night. Lent was just over and everybody was doing his best to make up for any time which might be considered lost. It was a most propitious time for the bursting of a scandal, and Mrs. Burns was not one to ignore opportunity.

As Billy handed Eve into their car, Winifred touched his arm. He turned and looked inquiringly back at her. She stood just behind him, obviously waiting for her own motor, and the light from the porte-cochère fell upon her brilliant eyes. Involuntarily Billy shuddered. Perhaps at that instant he had a premonition of what lay behind those shining eyes.

"Did you want me, Winifred?" He removed his hat politely and awaited her reply.

"Come to my house to-morrow at eleven. I've something to tell you, Billy."

"Can't you tell me now?" asked Billy, man-like.

"No." There was a tone of finality in Winifred's voice that could not be mistaken.

"Very well. I'll be there."

"Thanks. And, Billy, come alone, please."

"What was Winifred saying to you, Billy boy?" Eve asked sleepily when Billy had climbed in and seated himself beside her.

"She wanted me to call at her house to-morrow morning. Some more investing of her own personal fortune, I guess. Too bad she won't trust her husband to make her investments."

Eve was half asleep before he had finished. She had felt dreadfully bad at first about losing that note, but

deciding that one of the servants must have picked it up and thrown it away, she hastened to forget it.

Like a child, tired from play, Eve curled up in the seat, and resting her blonde head, with its babyish curls, on Billy's shoulder and nestling down in his encircling arm, went fast asleep.

When they had reached their home Billy lifted her out and almost carried her into the house. It was not the first time that he had carried her so. He loved to make a baby of her. To have her fingers clasped round his neck and to hear her mutter something sleepily against his shoulder.

At eleven o'clock the following day Billy presented himself at Winifred's home.

A strange scene took place in her spacious drawing-room a few moments later—a scene which neither Winifred nor Billy Norton ever forgot.

Winifred began gently by telling Billy that she was his friend; in fact, that she was sacrificing the friendship of another, and perhaps even that of himself, because she was going to tell him that which she thought he should know. It hurt her to tell it, but it hurt her more to know that he was being cheated and—a great many other preliminary things which she meant to pave the way for the one big thing she had to say to him.

She knew Billy well enough to know that when she fired her shot it had to hit the mark. He would never allow her a second chance. Moreover, he would not believe it. She knew that also, but—well, at least she would have done her duty.

"It's about Eve, Billy. I'm worried about her."

Billy started. Was anything wrong with Eve of which he did not know? She had had a slight cough could it be—— Billy leaned forward anxiously.

"What is it, Winifred? Don't beat around the bush. What is it?"

"I'm afraid that you are going to lose her, Billy."

Everybody but you knows that she is meeting Carryl Langley clandestinely."

Billy sprang to his feet with a cry that was not human.

"Don't you dare say that again to anybody living or I'll—I'll——! I can't tell you in your own house what I think of you, but if ever I meet you outside it I shall take pleasure in doing so,—perhaps that prospect will keep you out of my path!"

Billy turned on his heel to leave the room, but quick as a flash Winifred thrust a crumpled slip of paper into his hand.

"That is a note to your wife from Langley."

Winifred still smiled, but her face was deathly pale. Billy wheeled about like an angered lion, and without a glance at the scrap of paper tore it into bits and threw them at the smiling woman. Then with something between a sob and an oath he staggered from the house and in a blind fury made his way home.

Disconnectedly and incoherently he thought of the thing this woman had said about his Eve—his trusting, innocent little girl, and he swore to seek out every man and woman who had dared even *think* ill of her and bring them to an accounting, providing always that the whole wretched thing was not a product of that terrible woman's own malicious brain.

Billy's head ached, but he was not aware of it. He was conscious only of two things,—a desire for revenge against everybody who had maligned his girl and the desire to get to that little girl as soon as he could,—to take her in his arms and shield her from all threatening things.

He ran up the steps two at a time. At the first landing he stopped. Eve's voice came to him from her boudoir, the door of which was ajar.

"He's gone to see Winifred. I will dress right away, and I can be at the usual place within an hour. What?—No. I shan't keep you waiting, Carryl. Bye, bye."

Billy stood as if petrified. Something cold and clammy slid over his body. His lips parted once as if he would speak, but no sound came from them. His arms hung, limp and inert, at his sides. His face had gone suddenly old and gray. His eyes seemed to sink into great caverns in his head.

If he thought at all his thoughts were foolish ones. When we are dying, or worse, we sometimes wonder how anybody could possibly like yellow wall paper or if the caddy found the golf ball we lost yesterday or—whether musical comedy is going to floor the drama.

Mechanically Billy felt his way to his wife's door. He paused there an instant until the sound of his wife's voice humming a gay new love song came out to him. Instantly he straightened himself and with well-controlled nerves and emotions pushed open the door and entered.

CHAPTER XVII

EVE sat at her dressing table, gowned in one of her most becoming negligées. It was made from some soft, clinging material which displayed rather than hid the delicately rounded limbs and slender, undulating body.

Billy's eyes burned as he looked at her. To him she had stood for everything fine and beautiful in life. She——

"Why, Billy, back so early?"

Eve glanced up in surprise, her eyebrows lifted.

Billy leaned heavily against the back of a chair.

"Yes. I came back earlier than I had expected, but don't let that interfere with any engagements that you may have made."

There was an aching note of bitterness in Billy's monotone, but it escaped his wife. She was smiling. A vision of some past humorous incident had risen abruptly before her, as visions have an inexplicable habit of doing, and Billy and his sudden return were for the instant forgotten. When she remembered him she turned two twinkling blue eyes in his direction.

"Billy, do you remember the day you dressed up in one of my evening gowns while I donned one of your suits and we started downstairs to shock the servants by dining as we were,—I as Mr. Norton and you as my wife—and how you got your feet all tangled up in the train of the gown and went spinning downstairs, head first? And, Billy, do you recall what the doctor said when he called to dress your scratches? He said, disgustedly, that we both needed nurse maids!" Eve laughed reminiscently as she turned again to her mirror.

Yes. Billy remembered. But Billy did not laugh. He

longed to hide his face in one of those soft, silken pillows over there on the lounge and sob as he had sobbed when they had told him that his mother was dead. He was fifteen then. He was twice that age now. But the storm in his soul needed an outlet, and sobbing would be a safe one. Subconsciously he felt the storm pounding against the closed gates of dangerous canals. Vaguely he knew that he must let his flood of passion escape in some harmless way before one of the gates of those dangerous locks gave way and he did damage either to himself, the other man or this beautiful being before him.

For a long time there was silence, except an occasional gurgle of laughter from the woman at the dressing table. Billy gripped the back of the chair until his knuckles showed white under the tensely drawn skin of his fingers.

So this was the way it was all to end! The mire where purity had been! Guilt! Guilt! To Billy's ears everything in the room was shrieking that word at him. The silence was reeking with guilt. It made shrill discords in her rippling laughter when she laughed. It looked mockingly out at him from her smiling eyes. There was guilt in the very moth-like movements of her slim white hands as they fluttered about through the maze of gold-stoppered, crystal bottles on her dressing table. He shivered when her fingers rattled some little gold hair pins which were in a shimmering tray of gold. The metallic sound was Satan breaking Faith with a sledge hammer. The very walls were slimy with slaughtered truth, like the walls of a foul-smelling cave.

He wanted to spring upon the woman—the gorgeous, butterfly thing that the world called his wife, upon the golden tray with its load of golden pins so like her hair, upon the taunting pictures and reeking walls and smash them all together into a pulp,—a mass of torn, painted canvas, broken plaster, battered gold and bruised white flesh. He wanted to do violence. His whole being ached to hurl itself upon this room and to wreck it. Then

he would like to stand up in the center of the ruins and know that he had avenged himself. His fingers closed and unclosed spasmodically. His breath came in labored little gasps. For a second he stood so, though to him it was centuries. Then the woman looked inquiringly up at him.

"Why do you stand so silent, boy dear?" The familiar term of endearment made Billy's flesh quiver.

"Have you anything to tell me, Eve? Anything that I should know?"

Somehow the words came of their own volition. The man's voice was tense and strained, but his wife did not notice. Her eyebrows arched interrogatively.

"*Mais, que voulez vous?* What is it that you wish to know?"

How maddeningly sweet was her smile which no longer meant anything but Guilt!

"Nothing. I only thought you might wish to say something to me."

Billy sighed heavily. The tenseness went from his body suddenly, leaving it weak and inert. The desire to do violence had flown, and in its place came a longing to get out into the air, into pure air, God's air. The scent of violets which permeated the room was making him sick. He had loved the delicate, elusive scent of violets which always hung about the girl he had married. Now—it filled him with a feeling of nausea.

Blindly he felt his way to the door. He clutched for an instant the heavy drapery, but the plush under his fingers was like the fur of a cat and—cats were like this thing that had happened to him. They purred while they killed. He flung the drapery from him with something between a sob and an oath and stumbled into the corridor.

Some occult thing must guide the feet of men who are blind from some great mental stress, else surely Billy Norton must have fallen down the polished stairs which reflected like a mirror the staggering master of the house.

He was numb mentally and physically. He thought with difficulty. But the moment the cool air of the out-of-doors touched his face with pitying gentleness, all that was life within him—mind and body—became acutely conscious. He paused and looked about him like a man who is looking for the first time upon strange things. How sordid and unclean everything looked! The marble steps were unwashed. The brasses of the heavy doors were finger-marked. The trees were brown with dust. He did not remember ever seeing trees so dust-laden before.

He strode down the street with careful, precise steps, like a drunken man who, knowing that something is wrong with his feet, endeavors to hide the knowledge from everybody else.

He remembered distinctly how She had looked there at her dressing table. He remembered it vividly yet as though centuries had elapsed since the real picture had been before his aching eyes. He whispered her name. Then he laughed. *Eve!* That had been the name of the first woman. The woman God sent to be the helpmate and companion of the first man. *Eve!* She was the woman who had tempted the father of all humanity. She had listened to the diabolical but alluring temptations of a serpent. *Eve! Eve! His Eve!* She had called him her Adam. She had twined her arms about his neck and smiled into his eyes when the serpent of their garden was whispering in his ear. She—His Eve—His little butterfly—!!!

Mechanically, yet with the same precision of step, Norton turned a corner which put him on one of those mean little side streets which hang like poor relations at the back doors of the fashionable thoroughfares. He was acutely conscious of the sordidness which rushed at him here from all sides. But he liked it. It fitted in with the wreck of his heart.

There were numerous street venders calling out their wares. There were countless children who looked all

alike—except that the face of one might be a trifle dirtier, if possible, than the face of another—playing in the uncleaned streets. Washes—great strings of them—were stretched high up in the air between the tenements, and the wind-inflated shirts beckoned furiously with flapping sleeves at the alien below. Norton paused and gazed imaginatively at a blue calico dress and a faded brown shirt which were pinned side by side on one of the lines. One clothes-pin sufficed where the two were joined together and there was something mutely intimate about that pin. It reminded Norton of a wedding ring. He smiled interestedly as the dress and shirt danced happily together away off there between those bee-hives of humanity. Wilder and wilder they danced, caressing each other with flapping sleeves. Then, suddenly, as Norton looked, a vicious gust of wind snapped the clothes-pin loose, and it went spinning to the ground. His fascinated eyes watched for a moment the shirt and calico dress. They were separated and hanging dejectedly awry. Norton laughed harshly and went on. A group of children who heard the laugh shrank back into an alleyway until he had passed.

There were signs on the doors of most of the buildings. Norton read them as he strode along. Some of them announced that a clairvoyant living within could tell you about your past and future for the modest sum of fifty cents. Most of those signs omitted the "past," using for bait only the "future."

"Telling one about the *future* is easier and safer," muttered the man who read them.

Other signs announced in uncertain letters—with the letter "s" always looking backwards—that "Dress-Making" was done on the "Third Floor, Rear," or the "Second Floor, Front." The only difference in those signs was that the "Second Floor, Front" signs always said "FANCY Dress-Making" instead of just "Dress-Making."

Then there were shoe cobblers, piano teachers,—Nor-

ton wondered why it was that most of the inhabitants of this wretched street had pianos, whether or not they had anything else. He could hear a hundred "Katies" and "Marys" practicing in a single block on cheap pianos, painfully out of tune,—paper-hangers, insurance agents and milk depots, all telling the passersby what could be had or done within. Then there were "Rent" signs of every kind and description. Houses to rent. Flats to rent. Barns to rent. Rooms, single or double, "very reasonable" for sleeping or "light housekeeping." Nearly all of these signs looked as if they had been made by an education-acquiring son or daughter of the house who had used his or her finger in lieu of a brush, and instead of ink the black shoe polish, which is always kept in those houses for the purpose of disguising, on Sunday morning, the shoes worn by the members of the family during the week.

Norton's mind grasped something from everything he passed. Never before had he been so observant. A dull pain throbbed at the back of his head, but his brain was alert to his surroundings in a clear, analytical sort of way.

When he dodged a ragged baseball which went whizzing over his head he resolved to have an ordinance passed prohibiting the throwing of a ball on the street. The next moment he recalled the resolve and decided to donate a ball park to the boys of the poor.

When he saw a tiny rag-a-muffin weeping loudly and with a monotony of sound which told very plainly that the weeping had been going on for some time and that the lusty little lungs were getting tired—he stooped and patted the matted hair on the little head and asked solicitously about her trouble.

Instantly the weeping ceased, as if some one had abruptly turned off the current, and a pair of dry, suspicious eyes looked up at him. The little rag-a-muffin had heard times a plenty about strange men who sneaked about stealing children to hold them for ransom, what-

ever that was. They were called kidnappers. Well, he couldn't "nap" her, this man with the fine clothes who looked just like the villain she had seen that time her big sister had taken her to a "meller-dramer." That villain had tied a girl to a railroad track, and although she had not understood the rest of the play, she had understood that and had screamed so loudly that a man had come and ordered her sister to take "that squalling brat home." Her sister had taken her home all right, but she had pinched her every step of the way. She didn't care. Maybe everybody else liked to see that poor girl get run over by a train. She didn't. And now here was one of those villains. Perhaps he wanted to tie her to a railroad track. Well, he just wouldn't! That's all. *He just wouldn't.* Her one big defense, the one that always had served well in the neighborhood to show anybody exactly what she thought of him, was immediately put to use. A very pointed little tongue shot out, snake-like, at Norton, and a tiny nose was wrinkled at him, too.

"I'm not going to hurt you, little girl. I thought that perhaps you had broken your doll, and I was going to offer to buy you another."

Like a flash, this child (who had never owned a doll other than a make-believe one which she occasionally fashioned from her mother's apron) invented the most marvelous and heartrending story of how Jakey Klien had broken her lovely doll for which "popper" had paid "a awful lot of money."

Billy Norton promised her a new doll with the assurance that no matter how fine the deceased doll had been its successor should be finer, and making a note of the number of the house which she pointed out to him as "home," he asked her her name.

"Maria Clanskivensky," the child replied. "And don't you make no mistake, mister. There's a lot of Clanskivenskys living in that house. I got a lot of cousins, but they ain't none of 'em named Maria like me."

Norton wrote down the name and wandered on. The

pain at the base of his brain was getting more poignant, but he refused to listen to it. He waded through more children, scores of them in each block. There were such a lot of them that he fell to wondering that one of them could be missed if he failed to show up at his individual home at night. He knew what a powwow the people, the press and the police made when such a thing occurred. Yet why should they? There were millions of the same brand on the very street where the lost child had lived. After all, only their *own* children existed to the men and women who had them. He had loved children, too. All children! He hadn't any,—except Eve. She was a child. No, she wasn't! She was the Eve who had let the serpent into their garden. The pain at the back of his head became suddenly sharp and insistent. He pressed one hand to the spot and went on, grimly determined to give it no heed. A fish peddler and his wife passed him by. He saw the rapt, upturned face of the fish peddler's wife as she chattered away in a foreign tongue. He longed to shriek after them:

"She lies! She lies! She lies!"

He turned another corner and came upon more familiar things,—familiar yet strangely unfamiliar! For instance, here was the residence of some one whom he knew, but never before had noticed its lack of architectural beauty. It was grotesque. Over there was a church, a very great, very fashionable church, at the altar of which he had knelt many times with Eve. He recalled just how the rainbow lights from the stained-glass windows always fell across Eve's bowed golden head. He even remembered that, though he had always gone to this place of worship with Eve, his religion had begun and ended with that golden head. His real place of worship had been his heart where the incense of his love had been kept burning constantly. All days had been worship days for him, yet on those days when others worshipped he had come here with Eve. He knew the place well. It was on the same street with his home,

but there was something about this church which he did not recognize,—a smirk that was hypocrisy, an aloofness which repelled, a glint to the Gothic windows, which made him think that they had gazed searchingly many times through the pages of Bradstreet. A "I am more holy than thou" sort of look was about the great pillars on either side of the entrance. The high door itself grinned at him maliciously. To the man's fevered brain this magnificent Gothic structure was laughing at him. He stooped and picked up a stone which lay in his path. He had a delirious impulse to send it crashing through one of those stained-glass windows which had thrown their brilliant colored lights—like a glorious halo—around the golden-haired woman he had called his wife. But the feel of the stone between his fingers filled him with an inconsistent repentance. There was instantly a revulsion of feeling. The stone dropped with a clatter to the pavement.

Then came a hungry desire to kneel again at that peaceful altar,—to let the warm light which filtered through the stained-glass windows heal the hurt that was in his heart and head. But he did not enter the church. He continued his way down the street.

Suddenly before him arose a structure of wonderful beauty. This one was more familiar, and yet more unfamiliar, than all the rest. He looked at it with a feeling that he had known every stone in it,—every grain of sand in the mortar of it, in some dead age when he had perhaps been on earth as some one else, yet—to-day it seemed new and strange to him.

That place was *his* house. He knew that, yet he looked at it with wondering eyes. Something in his brain seemed to snap, and the harrowing pain spread with a rush over his entire body.

"My home!" he cried with eyes blinded by tears. "My home—hers and mine!" A man who had passed him turned and looked back as Norton's voice reached him. Then with a shrug he went on.

Billy leaned against a tree and gazed at the house. It was a beautiful house. He had been so proud when he had been able to give so costly a thing to his wife on their wedding day and now—now—— It still stood intact—stone upon stone—just as it had stood last week, last month or last year! But his home,—ah! *his home* lay in ruins about his feet. It had fallen about him in a crumbling mass. Any one of those huge blocks of stone that walled up his house would have killed him had it fallen upon him, yet his home—all four walls, roof and foundation had tumbled upon him, and still he lived! The material part of him lived. His soul lay dead beneath the débris. A great sob arose in his throat and choked him. Then with a gesture, as though to push the wreck from him, he laughed harshly.

What did it matter? What did *he* matter? What did anything matter since *She* was no longer the architect and builder of his home?

They were giving a dinner that night, he and his wife. He would go up to his own room and wait for the hour when he could put a hurt at the back of the head of the man who had razed his home. He was sure to come. He was always one of their guests. He remembered now that it was Langley who usually arrived first,—that it was Langley who always left last. Oh, yes. Langley would be there, and he, Norton, would have something for Langley which had not been mentioned in the program for the evening.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON a wonderful day in October when the trees vied with each other in the color-changing of their foliage, Hazel drove with Jim Atherton down the Champs Élysées toward the Bois. The summer had come and gone with a single breath of fragrance. Neither Hazel nor Jim could remember another so brief a summer. To Atherton there had been only a few days measuring twenty-four hours. Those were the ones in which he had had no glimpse of Hazel. The other days had been but so many moments.

To Hazel the summer had lacked the heat of other summers gone by. Supremely unconscious of the garlic-polluted air of the neighborhood in which she lived, her sensitive nostrils had accepted only the perfume of the flowers which she and Jim had planted, or caused to be planted, in the square near M. Dupont's studio.

Atherton had yearned a thousand times to pour out his heart to the girl. But he was afraid,—afraid of losing the ground which he had gained. When one has coaxed a wild bird to eat crumbs from one's hand,—when the bird has begun to believe in one, to have confidence in the outstretched hand, one is careful to not startle it. There is always the chance that it might fly away and be forever lost to one. Words of love,—beautifully garnished phrases,—were bread and meat to most women. But to Hazel,—ah! that was it! Hazel was different! That was what made him love her. She was like no one else on earth! He endowed her with a thousand virtues which had never been catalogued in the Good Book.

Thus the summer had gone with its little rides into the country, a half dozen children acting as chaperones,

or some tired, haggard woman, sitting opposite them on the soft-cushioned seat, drinking in with starved lungs the sweet, clover-scented air, her rough, big-jointed hands lying in unaccustomed idleness in her lap,—with its stolen hours, during which they wandered happily through the Louvre or stood on the left shore of the Seine and gazed silently down the river or back down the Boulevard Saint Germain. Once they had entered, with reverent, hesitating feet, old Notre Dame. At another time they had stood in silent awe before the tomb of Napoleon. The months had been weeks, the weeks days, and the days but moments snatched from eternity.

To-morrow Hazel and M. Dupont were sailing for America. Although neither Hazel nor Jim spoke of it, each felt that life in New York would never be the same as life had been for them over here in this wonderful city of the French. For a long time neither spoke, but when suddenly the chauffeur swung the car into the Avenue des Acacias, Hazel turned to Atherton with a half-smothered sigh.

"The fragrance is disappearing. Do you remember the day we had Paul stop here? We sat quite still—afraid of disturbing the delicate perfume—and filled our lungs with the sweet-scented air."

"Do you think that I could forget?"

Atherton's eyes were disconcerting, and Hazel moved warningly.

"When do you think that you will come over to America?" Hazel's voice was calmly conversational, but her heart pounded with astonishing ferocity.

"I've engaged passage on the *France*. You won't mind my going on the same ship with you?"

"What a silly question! How could I? But surely you must have made your decision very suddenly. You did not mention before that you were sailing with us." Hazel was annoyed at the warm, joyous color which she knew was flooding her face.

"I was afraid that you might not like it, that you

might think me presuming in thus forcing my presence upon you."

"You seem to have forgotten that ships are public transports. I have nothing at all to do with the choosing of the passengers who will make up the sailing list of the *France*. Besides," a mischievous twinkle came to the girl's eyes, "it is a big ship and there will be little chance for the forcing of one's presence upon anybody who would not appreciate it. We really could arrange it so that we would not need to meet at all *en voyage*."

"Will you always laugh at me, Hazel?"

"Not always. Sometimes I laugh *with* you, *n'est-ce pas?*"

After a brief silence, Atherton remarked:

"I wonder if you would stop with me at the Pavillon d'Armenonville for dinner?"

"You might ask me, and see," hinted Hazel, laughing up into his handsome face.

Atherton's eyes showed his surprised delight at her unexpected answer. Hazel had never dined alone with him at night. They had lunched together when they had been busy concocting some plan for aiding her beloved poor, and they had minced sandwiches in the country when grasshoppers and children, equally ravenous and socialistic, had jumped around and over them. But never had this wonderful girl sat opposite him at a little table for two, with shaded electric lights casting a soft glow over her lovely face and her sweet voice making one with the seductive music of the orchestra.

"Will you?" Atherton cried beseechingly.

"If you'll not wonder at my capacity. I'm horribly hungry, and I may grow primitive and eat with my fingers. Oh, la! la! Then what would the æsthetic Mr. Atherton do? Crawl under the table, I'll wager."

Jim took the badinage with a radiant smile. She might use his neck for a foot-stool and he would still be foolishly happy. Had she not just made an unprecedented concession?

When they were seated vis-à-vis at a table in a secluded corner of the restaurant, he thought she had never looked so beautiful. Against the dark wall her face was like a cameo in which had been set two glowing ebony eyes and a ruby mouth. She smiled at him over the scarlet heads of a bunch of carnations, and Atherton knew that the time was growing near when he would be able to live no longer in ignorance of his fate, when he would have to know whether or not this glorious being would share his future.

It was twilight when they left the restaurant and began the drive home. At the little square, where Hazel had always insisted that he leave her, they left the car without words, and as if by mutual consent made their way into the little park.

The moon had risen, and the few stragglers who still lingered, sprawling about on the worn benches, were the originals of grotesque and fantastic shadows that fell across the graveled walk. Atherton led the way to a seat beside the great marble fountain which arose like a wraith in the center of the square. He wiped the dew from it with his linen handkerchief, and they seated themselves, still without speaking.

The fountain had been erected in the early summer. On the day of its unveiling Hazel had stood with the crowd patiently listening to several speakers, men that had nothing in common with the people who would be benefited by that fountain, but who never missed an opportunity to inflict their voices and gesticulations upon a public gathering. Then Atherton had made his way to her side just as a little girl of the neighborhood, dressed in an immaculate but much patched white muslin dress (which instinctively one knew had done service for more than one older sister), with the help of several men, unveiled the beautiful new fountain.

A cheer had gone up from a thousand throats and then—Hazel could never remember how it happened—she was being carried on the shoulders of two stalwart

men (in the home of each of whom she had once kept the candles burning) through the cheering crowd toward the thing of carved marble. As they neared it she had given a little cry and struggled to her feet. There before her, carved in that huge offering to these proletariats, these people whom she pitied and loved,—was—*her* name!

"TO MY BELOVED FRIENDS—THE PEOPLE AND
BIRDS OF ALL NATIONS, WHO HAVE GATHERED
HERE IN THE PAST AND WHO WILL GATHER
HERE IN THE FUTURE. HAZEL WILLIS."

She never knew just what happened next. When she recovered herself she was lying back in a wicker chair in the studio of M. Dupont, and that good man was talking to her volubly in a mixture of French and English. There were wet streaks in the furrows of the little master's cheeks, and his voice was vibrant with feeling.

"You see, Mademoiselle, he loves you. He is one grand man, one *tres supérieur* man. But he is not for you, ma chère. Remember zat; he is not for you. No! No! Mon Dieu. But it will be hard for you and for him. But your work, *ma petite fille*, your work and the man who has sown? That man must reap. You must not forget him and his ambitions for you. Ah, it eez so many who sow who never reap. It eez that so many who accept the seed give forth no fruit. They know not—what you call it—*see gratitude*. You must sing, ma chère! You must have *see career*. Marriage, it eez not for you. No! No!"

A pain had come into Hazel's heart, she did not know why. Yet it had come with the master's words, and it had never gone away.

She thought of that day—it seemed but yesterday—when this beautiful piece of marble had been unveiled. She remembered the master's earnest voice, vibrant with

feeling. It came back to her now with all the things it had said. Unconsciously she shivered.

"You are cold?" Atherton bent solicitously over her.

"No, thank you." After a pause: "I was recalling that day the fountain was unveiled. You have never allowed me to talk to you about it—about my name—being—upon—it. You took none of the glory for yourself, but I have seen to it that everybody in the neighborhood knows whose money paid for their cherished fountain."

"Did you, by any chance, tell them whose sweet spirit of fellowship and charity inspired it?"

Hazel was silent. Her hands trembled and her breath came quickly. This man, to whom her ridiculous stepfather had bequeathed her in that long ago of her childhood, played chords in her soul, which no one else in all the world had ever touched. She had belonged to him and—she had run away! Yes. She had run away. And now—and now——

Jim Atherton put out one of his hands and laid it with gentle tenderness over her two trembling ones. She did not move. She sat very still,—her heart pounding and her head dizzy. She knew that she should withdraw her hands—that she should make an effort to avoid the crisis that she felt was imminent. But she knew also that the psychological moment had arrived and that nothing she could do would change it. It was the hand of fate which rested so tenderly on hers. She gazed with brimming eyes at a blurred moon and held her breath. Some golden-brown leaves bade farewell to the tree under which they were sitting and came fluttering down upon them like a flock of friendly birds. A grave face with kind gray eyes peered at her from the shadow of the fountain. It was the face of her dear benefactor, and it was wistful and sad. Her heart ached, and she longed to withdraw her fingers from the hand of fate and to tell the face there in the shadows that she would not fail him, that his great opera should be sung if her voice

and M. Dupont could make it possible. But she closed her eyes instead and whispered:

"Just this once I will be a woman. Just this once. Then—then I will be a career! Then! Then!! But now—now,—just this once let me be a woman! Let me taste the thing that other women have. Let me love just one moment out of my lifetime and I will promise to make that single morsel of joy last me unto the end. But now—just this once——"

"Dear"—Jim was speaking, and Hazel strained to catch each tone of his voice. Ah, dear God! Had music ever been so sweet?"—"I can't go on like this. I love you, and I can no longer keep it hidden in my heart. Long ago an old man willed to me the little girl of whom I have often told you. I pretend to myself that you are she—that you *belong* to me, that you are mine. But I am no longer satisfied with *pretending*. I want you, dear! I want you as man never before wanted woman. Dear, you are not withdrawing your hands,—you are not making an effort to leave me—you are not even forbidding me this wonderful subject—— Can it be, Hazel dearest of women—can it—be—that——"

He hesitated to say the last word. He dreaded what her answer might mean to him. His fingers closed with an involuntary grip that hurt the tender flesh of her hands. But it was a hurt that gave joy, and she would have liked to be always hurt by those powerful fingers. She opened her dark eyes and looked up at him. He gazed into them hungrily, and there was no need to answer. He knew. Her reply was there, in those soft, dusky pools.

There came a smothered exclamation from the depths of Atherton's throat. His face went white with sudden joy. Tenderly, carefully—so as not to frighten her—he slipped one arm around the slender figure and drew the dark head to his shoulder. For the moment he dared not kiss her. He was so desperately afraid of losing the wonderful jewel of which he had just become possessed,

—afraid lest some act of his might cause this great, new happiness to vanish like a mirage.

To Hazel the arm which encircled her was a wall that shut out all the rest of the world. It would protect her from the onslaught of anything that could hurt her—so long as it was given *carte blanche*. Ah, but it was there only for the moment. To-morrow it would be gone. And the next day. And the next. All the rest of her life she would be without that protecting arm. But to-night,—to-night——! The rest of her life belonged to the man who had befriended her, but this one night out of eternity belonged to her and to—HIM. Timidly she pressed her head closer to Jim's big shoulder. This shy proof of reciprocation was too much for the man whose heart yearned for her. It opened the flood-gates of his love, and it rushed out to her like a mighty stream through a broken dam. With a quick gesture he lifted the girl's face from the rough cloth of his coat and pressed his lips to hers.

The moon crept abashed behind a cloud. The leaves of the trees about them whispered things that must have been love-poems, and those that lay in little heaps at their feet rustled sympathetically with a gentle breeze.

For a long time they sat silent, their cheeks touching, their hearts throbbing. Then Hazel stirred. Slowly she withdrew from Atherton's arms. Sadly but with determination, she put aside his detaining hand. He did not understand.

"You are tired," he exclaimed contritely. "You are tired, and I have kept you out in this cool night air much too late. But to-night—— Ah, to-night—I wish it were endless!"

"Yes. To-night——! There will never be another like it." Hazel sighed and, reaching out, touched his hand fleetingly with one of hers.

"Oh, yes, there will be,—ever and ever so many of them, only, of course, *this* night will always stand out from the rest because it was the night of the plighting

of our troth. You must go now, but first I must know when,—how soon,—I may really call you mine. I will not be able to wait for you long, dear girl of my heart."

He leaned toward her, but in his earnestness, and because he looked at that moment with his soul rather than his eyes, he did not see the sadness and pain that the moon, peering out at the edge of the cloud, made legible on her beautiful face.

"I—I don't know how I am going to tell you," she hesitated, "Jim. But I hope that you will help me by striving to understand. I——"

"Yes, Hazel dear. You——" Atherton encouraged, still happily unconscious of his tumbling dreams.

Hazel turned her misty eyes toward the fountain which bore, in deeply carved letters, her name.

"Jim, we haven't plighted our troth. We—— You can never call me yours. I can never belong to you. We——"

Atherton started. Catching her tightly clasped hands almost roughly from her lap and pulling them to his breast, he cried with swift, unbelieving words that were scarcely coherent:

"You can't mean—that you—that you will not marry me?"

"Yes, Jim. That is what I mean."

"But you—— Why, you let me think—that—you—you cared for me!" he burst forth jerkily.

"I *do* care."

"Then why——"

"Because I can never marry anybody, Jim. I have been educated and trained for a career. I owe allegiance to that. Some one else has paid for the training. But the paying is the least of all the things he has done for me, and the money is the least of my debt."

Jim Atherton gazed at the girl stupidly.

"Do you wish me to understand that you would rather sing to a fickle public than be my wife?"

Hazel sorrowfully regretted her impotence to explain,

and there sprang into her heart a doubt as to whether this man who loved her would *ever* understand.

"It is not a question of what I would prefer to do. Rather is it a question of what I *must* do. Listen to me, Jim," said the girl compellingly. "Every year there are sent to the schools of the various arts, penniless students whose bills and tuition are paid by friends or philanthropists, who not having the talent themselves—or perhaps the time—pour out their ambitions on somebody else. Now, as near as M. Dupont and I can discover, these students, at least ninety per cent. of them, take the money and the ambitions as their due, and when success comes, as it occasionally does, to one of them, he forgets the one who gave him the stepping-stones. Perhaps you can guess at what it might mean to my benefactor if I cast my stepping-stones back into his face. I can't take my own happiness at that price. I owe him gratitude. I *am* grateful. Just *how* grateful,—I have yet to prove to him. My one ambition,—my one goal, is to bring to Allen Hamilton a harvest for his sowing."

"Yet you allowed me to caress you, knowing this?"

Suddenly Hazel realized what she had done. She had been unfair to this man in her selfishness. Her whole being ached with vain regrets.

"Yes, that is true, and for it I deserve your contempt. I—I knew that I belonged to a career, yet I allowed you to caress me because—I wanted that one moment of love. For that I would have done even more,—for that—I would have died."

The man suddenly understood. He looked at the girl he loved with new eyes,—eyes that saw strange things in her which he had never seen before. He had known her as a gay, impudent girl, whose quick wit was a shining jewel. He had known her again as an angel to the wretched poor of the vicinity in which she lived. But here he was confronted of a sudden with a soul of a martyr who was giving itself to a capricious public in order that a man who had sown might reap. How won-

derful she was! How far above every one whom he knew! How loyal to a cause! How utterly unselfish! And all this he was losing! Abruptly he bent forward and buried his face in his hands. A tremor ran through his body. Hazel saw it, and all the material instinct of a loving woman was rampant within her. He was hurt! Her man! Her man, who would always be a boy to her! She longed to hold his head tight against her aching breast! But she must not touch him, he could not stand that. Neither could she. Already she had created enough havoc with that one moment which had tempted her and to which she had fallen a victim,—dragging him with her.

"I—I am glad that you understand. I was afraid that—that you might never see the thing as I see it, and then I should have been so wretched. If you will forgive me, I—I will go home and perhaps we can—can forget to-night."

The beseeching wistfulness in her voice brought Ather-ton's head up with a jerk. He was hurting her. He would rather die than hurt her. After all, she *cared*. That was something, and who could tell what the future might do for them.

"I *do* understand, dear, and—I have nothing to forgive. I would not erase to-night from my life even if I could. It has been an oasis. I shall never forget it nor even remember less distinctly each incident than I shall remember them to-night, when you have gone from me and I am alone. I am glad that you gave me that brief sixty seconds. The memory of them shall endure to the end. I should like to ask you to promise me many things, and chief among them would be a promise that you would reconsider your decision and perhaps talk it over with Allen Hamilton when you have reached New York. But I will bind you to nothing. I know that if the time ever comes when you can belong to me you will send for me. That knowledge will sustain me." He sighed and glanced at his watch with a perfunctoriness

that was meant to hide his emotion. "It is late, and you must go; I would insist that I be allowed to accompany you down that hole of a block if I did not know by past experience that you prefer to show me how perfectly safe you are among these half-civilized people whom you call your friends."

Atherton arose and extended his hand with studied friendliness. Hazel, too, stood. She placed one cold, ungloved little hand in his outstretched one, and smiled a grateful, albeit a wan, smile at him.

"Good night, Jim."

"Good-bye, Hazel."

Their hands fell apart, and the girl turned and walked hastily away. There was no backward glance. She dared not trust herself to look back at him. She stumbled on blindly, feeling that life and even Heaven itself was being left behind! Heaven was there by the fountain in the heart of the square, and it was silently begging her to return.

Atherton stood with bared head, gazing at the woman who was walking so swiftly out of his life. When she had reached a certain distance from him, he did the thing which he always did when she left him here in the square after dark. He followed and saw her arrive safely at home. When the door of the house in which she lived had swung shut behind her, he went slowly back to the bench in the park where that wonderful moment had been lived. He sat there a long time, looking with unseeing eyes at the now overcast sky. It began to rain. A few cold raindrops splashed against his face. But still he sat,—as oblivious to the weather as were the figures hewn in the massive piece of marble in front of him.

It was early morning when he arose with stiffened limbs and—all unconscious of the cold and his drenched clothing—went wearily from the square where he had spent so many joyous hours and sixty seconds of perfect happiness.

CHAPTER XIX

AROUND the pier at Havre, where lay the liner *France*, there was the usual bustle of excitement which ever accompanies the sailing of a vessel, especially such a vessel as this. Her hour for casting off had arrived, and with each succeeding one of those last sixty minutes the excitement increased. Belated passengers were arriving in wild-eyed, nervous haste,—trying to rush past the ship's officers without detention and almost falling up the gang-plank. Numerous huge boxes were being lifted by great ropes or cables and dropped through a hatch into the hold with ever-increasing speed. Sweating, sullen men who handled the boxes and cables were being constantly spurred on to greater haste by the shrill cursing of "pier bosses." Cabs and automobiles were arriving and departing. Valises and trunks—tardy as their owners—were being thrown about with the customary indifference of baggage men. Passengers who were already settled for the voyage, whose luggage had long ago been stowed away in hold and stateroom, and whose hats and coats had already been exchanged for caps and ulsters, hung over the rails and repeated things to friends who stood below on the pier—things which they had said many times before within the short period of time they had hung there. There were endless and varied instructions and admonitions about this or that, to all of which those below nodded or shrieked vehement assent. Then the friends on the pier called back, equally often reiterated, instructions and admonitions to their dear departing ones. The gist of most of all that was said being an incessant plea from the one to the other that he or she should not forget to write often.

M. Dupont and Hazel leaned against the rail of the cabin deck and watched the constantly increasing confusion below,—the one with interested, sympathetic eyes, the other with dark, straining eyes that searched the crowd below for a tall, straight figure with a familiar stride or caught for an instant at an arriving automobile,—deserting it again when the occupant was discovered to be a stranger.

"Look! They are still arriving. See that purple-faced woman trying to walk over the crowd!" M. Dupont chuckled—yet the chuckle was not all amusement,—the most of it was sympathy.

Hazel did not see the woman to whom he had reference. Her eyes were still busy with the crowd. But the little master's description of the belated passenger sent a twinkle into the anxious eyes.

"There are some people who always arrive at their destinations with their tongues hanging out," replied she, and her companion glanced at her with a little fluttering sigh of relief. He had not been unconscious of the anxiety in those sweet, straining eyes, and his heart had gone heavy. He, too, wondered that Jim Atherton did not come. Hazel had told him that morning on the way up that Atherton was sailing with them and M. Dupont had been anything but joyous at the news. The one rival to the career for which he had laid the foundation was that man, and M. Dupont, placing his young pupil on a plain far removed from matrimony and motherhood, feared propinquity as he feared nothing else in the world.

When the fleeting moments had brought no Atherton to the pier, M. Dupont had been glad. Then he had noticed the anxiety on the beautiful face of the girl at his side. Immediately the thought of career crumbled, and his tender old heart—which, after all, could not be expected to be loyal to worldly ambitions—ached for the girl and yearned for the appearance of the man she looked for. But at the first sparkle of wit from Hazel

the thought of her career reared itself from oblivion and ruthlessly slaughtered the yearning. When Hazel was sad or anxious the heart of any man on earth would yearn for the consummation of her desire. But when Hazel was radiating brilliance and cleverness,—ah, then it was different! Men might yearn still, but it would be for the consummation of their own desires and aspirations.

If the twinkle could still come to Hazel's eyes, then,—argued M. Dupont mentally,—her anxiety and disappointment could not be so serious a thing as he had at first feared. Again he was glad that no Jim Atherton, handsome, *débonnaire*, millionaire clubman of New York, was to be a fellow passenger. Unconsciously the little master spoke his last thought aloud. But only the descriptive part of it made itself plain to Hazel's ears.

"'Handsome, *débonnaire*, millionaire, clubman!' Why, *mon cher*, that sounds like the things I used to say on my buttons. Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief. Most of my dresses had either ten or eleven buttons down the back. The children used to count the buttons on each other's backs after Sunday School (that was about the only time I ever saw or associated with other children), and when they 'said' the ones on my dress they would have to go through the whole list and start over again. Mine always ended at 'poor man' or 'beggar man.' That meant that I was to marry a man who—er—followed either the one or the other of those—er—professions. That was not a desirable fortune, even when one left the future and the man out of it entirely, because the children liked to taunt me about my 'poor man' and 'beggar man.' One day a happy thought occurred to me, and I set it at once into action. *Mon cher ami*, would you believe that I could be so ingenious? I cut a button off the dresses which had ten, and two off those which had eleven. Then every Sunday I married a 'rich man,' according to my buttons, and I was supremely happy. But Burns sewed them on

as fast as I cut them off until she caught me at it one day and dragged me off, red-handed—scissors and all—to my mother. Mother was very serious until I had sobbingly explained, and then—dear, understanding mother—she put her arms around me and whispered in my ear—so that Burns might not hear (Burns very plainly disapproved of the way my mother ‘spared the rod,’ although she did her best to spoil me in her own way), that a new dress which was under construction for me at that moment should have exactly *nine* buttons,—no more and no less. Was there ever another such an understanding mother?”

For an instant the smile her reminiscences had brought to Hazel’s face disappeared and a cloud of sadness settled over it. Then M. Dupont coughed, and the smile came into existence once more as she asked:

“Were you ‘saying’ your buttons or mine a moment ago, mon ami?”

“Yours, ma petite fille, and they said——” The professor stopped abruptly.

“Yes?” interrogatively. “*What* did they say? Not the beggar man, I hope. I wouldn’t mind the poor man, but I’m sure I could never tolerate a beggar man.”

M. Dupont looked away from her smiling face, and it required some effort for him to say:

“They said merely ‘career.’”

Hazel continued to smile. But the smile was not from within now. It was mechanical.

“Ah, yes, of course. But I may cut some of my buttons off, *bon ami*, and then my fortune would read differently.”

“But you would not do that. No. *No*. NO. You are too fine. You would not want it to read differently.”

Hazel turned again to the sea of faces and the confusion below on the pier.

“I might *want* it to read differently, want it with all my heart. But you may rest in the assurance, monsieur, that I will never change the reading of my buttons.”

A boy in messenger's uniform touched the girl's arm. "Is this Miss Hazel Willis?" he asked, removing his cap.

Hazel nodded affirmatively, and immediately the boy extended a sealed envelope to her.

"He said there would be no answer," remarked the lad in French. Then, replacing his cap, he was gone.

Considerately M. Dupont turned his back toward the girl, pretending to be absorbed in something below. Intuitively he knew from whom the message had come. With flushing cheeks and palpitating heart, Hazel broke the seal and extracted the note. It read:

"I am forfeiting my passage on the *France*. It would be more than I could endure to be with you just now. A hungry man is foolish if he remains within sight of food which has been forbidden him.

"I am off to Africa. The solitude of the wide spaces of sand, the profound, insinuating silence, the desert with the sky, like an inverted saucer, meeting it at the rim, the illimitable distances, a low, sun-bleached tent and a camel,—all these things are calling me. They offer me balm. Away off there when my man and I are the only living things which—so we are told—are fashioned after the image of God, I will learn to think of you without pain. But just now the wound has salt in it—the salt of tears that come from my soul. There are those who can let their sorrows escape through their eyes. There are those who must let them escape through their souls. The latter are unfortunate. Their method is slower. I belong to that class.

"M. Dupont told me several days ago that you would make your début with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at their New York recital on the night of October twenty-fifth. On that night, at the exact hour when you will sing—I shall have the time figured out allowing for the difference between New York and the place in which my tent is stretched—I shall touch my forehead to the

sand after the manner of the natives and ask Allah to give to my lady success, and despite my innate selfishness I shall be sincere. One does not ask things of Allah unless one means them.

"When we again meet, dear, wonderful little girl, we will have learned to remember last night with a gladness that it was just as a mother learns to handle without pain the treasured toys of her little one who is gone. She cries bitterly at first whenever she sees them. But after a while she is reconciled to her little one's absence, and, far from regretting that he ever was, she is glad that she had him for even so brief a time and that, through memory, she can reach out and touch the days that were.

"Be a brave little woman, and never forget that you came from the melting pot *all gold*. Bon voyage, beloved.
JIM."

Hazel folded the note with trembling fingers. With averted face, she slipped by M. Dupont, and made her way blindly from the deck.

She unlocked and opened the door of her stateroom, but she paused on the threshold in amazement and wonder. The place was a bower of her favorite flowers, American Beauty roses. She glanced in bewilderment at her key, thinking that she might have made a mistake. The number of it corresponded with the number of the room which she knew was hers. And there across the bed was her hat and coat just where she had thrown them an hour before, and those were *her* initials on the end of the steamer trunk which showed from under the end of the bed. Still bewildered, still wondering, she entered and closed the door behind her. Instantly the air was heavy with perfume. She touched the button in the wall, then stood transfixed until there came a rap on her door. To the brass-buttoned boy who answered her "come in," she said:

"Do you know how came these flowers in my room?"

The boy thought he had never seen so lovely a face. From that moment he was her slave.

"Several great boxes of them came to the stateroom steward, ma'am, with instructions that they be taken at once from the boxes and put in your room."

"Was there no card nor name?"

"No, ma'am."

Hazel tried to slip a coin into the boy's hand, but for the first time since he had worn that uniform the boy stood at a stateroom door with his arms behind him, each hand determinedly closed. Some way it would have seemed like taking a tip from a queen or an angel to take a coin from this girl whose eyes were darker and wider than any eyes he had ever seen, whose face was pale and whose lips were redder than any *real* red of any lips in the world, and the boy knew the real from the artificial.

The tip had been offered as his dismissal, and yet he lingered until there was no longer half an excuse for remaining. Then he bowed with a deference that would have surprised his steward, had he seen it, into giving him a day off and putting him in charge of the steamer's physician. When the door had closed behind him and Hazel was alone, she threw her arms around a cluster of the roses and buried her face in the fragrant petals.

Last night she had been strong. Last night her feet had swerved from the path of duty, but they had come back again. To-day she was weak, pitifully weak. Last night she had gone from the man who had sent these roses with not even a backward glance. Last night she had had determination. Last night she had told him that she could never belong to him. Would she tell him that now if he were here? Would she have determination now? Would she leave him now if he were here stretching out his arms to her? She did not know. She could not tell. To-day when she had leaned against the rail outside and searched vainly for his face in the crowd on

the pier, she had realized suddenly what this new thing in her life would mean to her, and she had shivered. Yet she felt now that she would not have it otherwise. Some one had once said, "Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all," and to-day she believed that, despite the pain in her heart and the stringent tightness at her throat.

Africa! How far away it was! The "wide spaces of sand, the profound, insinuating silence, the illimitable distances, a sun-bleached tent and a camel"! On the night when she would first sing to the public and to the man for whom she had sacrificed love, *her* man—the primitive in her persisted in calling Atherton "her man"—would touch his forehead to the sand, away off there in that lonely, endless place and ask Allah to give to her success!

Allah! Allah! Allah!

She closed her eyes and fancied she heard him repeating the word sadly, beseechingly, monotonously.

He loved her. *He loved her.* She would never weary of saying that to herself. It would always be as music to her.

Career! *Career!* CAREER! Debt! *Debt!* DEBT! Pay! *Pay!* PAY!

She must always pay! She had built up a wall of debt around herself from which she could never hope to escape. She had run away in her foolish, impulsive childhood from this man, and had buried her identity and wrenched promises from others to never reveal it and now—now—

Suddenly she clenched her hands, and her arms fell from the flowers with a gesture of despair.

"I can't endure it! I can't endure it!" she cried in an agony of emotion.

Then the face of the man who had found her with her dog and her shabby bag in a great park of a great city rose before her. It looked at her with the gentleness of a great rough mastiff. He had bellowed at her.

Then he had found her there in the park and had taken her home with him. His letters, too, rose before her, and solicitous lines burned into her brain. Her fingers relaxed. The expression on her face softened. Her eyes became tender and moist.

No! No! NO! Not for all the world and its worldly loves would she forsake that man whose bread she had eaten,—whose ambitions she had fed. She knew that he believed in her as he believed (she was not sure if he believed in God) in life—that the thought that she might learn to care for some one so much that a career would mean a sacrifice to her had never occurred to him, and that if ever he should know of such a sacrifice he would not permit it.

He was so great, so good! He had meant so much to her in all those adolescent years when she had poured out her innermost thoughts to him. She had felt that in all the world no one ever would understand her as did he. She had mothered him in those letters. Always with the feeling that he belonged to her—that he needed her. At first she had felt that his need for her was that his dreamed-of opera might be sung, but later when he swore in his letters that he had never had a cold since she had sent him that muffler—or that he would try the charcoal tablets for his indigestion at once—or glance around and see if there really was any lady of his acquaintance whom he could consider marrying who herself would not object—it was then that she felt she was responsible for his welfare just as she had been responsible for the welfare of Tige. She had bullied and scolded him, petted and laughed at him in turn, and he had answered her letters, as Tige would have done could he have written.

When she had come abroad she had been compelled to leave Tige behind, and although she had cried much louder and longer than Tige had barked and whined the day when she had bidden him good-bye and gone away and left him—she had gone on living, gone on eating

and sleeping and partaking of the good things of life and—Tige—had—died!

"No! No! I would not desert him as I did Tige. I couldn't! Not for all the world, I couldn't!"

She flung herself on the bed and buried her face in the pillows, that the insidious fragrance of the warm red roses might not reach her to pull her reasoning scales heavily down on one side. She was mentally exhausted. Since last night there in the little square she had watched, like a curious bystander, the battle between love and duty,—between love of one kind and love of another, love for the *one* man and love for a dear, good friend to whom she was indebted,—which was raging in her soul. She was tired. Love—love for the one *man*—had lost. Would she have been less weary had it won? She did not know. She felt, though, that a victory for love would have left her with a bitter sense of unfairness. That love would have turned to ashes in her mouth because duty—gratitude—justice—lying stark and dead where they had been vanquished, would forever haunt her.

Lying there, face down on her pillow, she whispered a little prayer to her sainted mother—she had a habit of praying to her mother, and her prayers had soldered together the link that had been broken when that mother had gone into the Beyond—while outside on the decks her fellow passengers were watching France—the country in which she had studied music, learning with it so many other things, the place where she had matured from childhood to girlhood and thence, in a night, to womanhood—slipping off into the distance.

CHAPTER XX

BILLY NORTON dressed with numb, mechanical fingers on the night on which he and his wife were to entertain at a rather formal dinner, and descended the broad stairs of his home to the drawing-room just in time to receive the first guest—Carryl Langley.

Norton was one of those men who leave their business to take care of itself—which businesses usually refuse to do—or to be taken care of by paid underlings—which usually results in the underlings being taken care of by the business. His father had left him, amongst other things, a controlling interest in an old well-founded bank. It had always been considered the most solid bank in the city, although there was nothing in its physical appearance to give rise to that belief. It was one of those which occupy cramped little quarters in the old rookeries of stone that huddle together—propping each other up, as it were—on Wall Street or in its vicinity. One had to climb a half dozen stone steps to get to this bank from the street. Then one needed to open great, heavy doors of carved black walnut which had cost a small fortune a half century ago when the walnut trees had lived and died, and when one had allowed them to swing shut behind him one's first impression was that he had gotten inadvertently into a mausoleum. He felt, rather than smelled, the mustiness that clings always to places into which the sun has never shone. He felt, rather than saw, the tremendous height of the walls and the somber, discolored ceiling,—the black walnut desks and railings that were of the same vintage as the doors leading to the street, the hollowed places under the iron grills of the tellers' windows, made by the gold that

had slid back and forth across those counters in the years of a dead half century, the skull caps and alpaca coats of the stooped clerks and officers—all these one felt. One began to wonder if the bank were one of those struggling ones that are always on their last legs, and one decided that it must be so else the physical surroundings would have progressed with the times. But this impression only one who was a stranger would have received in the place. A stranger could not know that the gold which slid back and forth across those counters were in lumps that were fortunes. This institution had never descended to the keeping of "savings accounts." Always it had been a bank of the rich—the very rich. Neither could a stranger know that not a director of that bank—or even a depositor—would have welcomed the minutest change in the physical things that had been looked upon by their fathers and, in some instances, their grandfathers. Through these heavy walnut doors those men of other years had come. Under those same wickets fortunes—the seeds of greater fortunes—had passed. At that desk with the green baize top, where sat a wrinkled little man of sixty, had once sat that same little man's father. The big clock on the wall over there had ticked off the minutes, opening time, lunch time, closing time, for more than twoscore years, and although its hands were getting a bit uncertain, and it needed to be nursed and doctored pretty carefully, not a man who *knew* the clock would allow another to supersede it.

When Billy Norton was a baby his nurse had brought him here and sat him on his father's desk—Billy's father had been a man who believed in looking after one's business oneself—every Saturday at closing time, and he had ridden home in state with his father beside him, the coachman and footman, gorgeously knickerbockered and coated, sitting stiffly straight in front of him. Billy had loved that green livery with its countless brass buttons, and he had early made up his infantile mind to be a footman or coachman when he grew up. Sitting behind

a pair of spirited horses would be far more exciting, according to his way of figuring, than sitting at a stupid old desk in the bank.

Billy had not grown up to the coachman or even to the footman, but he had grown up to the love—expensive love—of spirited horses, pairs and singles. Also he had not sat at a stupid old desk in the bank. He had installed the old cashier in the position left vacant by the sudden demise of his father. In the cashier's chair he had put an old college chum—old in every thing but years. There had been a good deal of protest at the installation of this first "rank outsider," but as no one had an available relative for the place Billy was allowed to have his way and this had left him free for the pursuit of pleasure—free from the worries of the musty old bank.

When the butler announced Carryl Langley immediately upon the heels of Norton's entrance to the drawing-room, the hands of the master of the house clenched involuntarily. Langley came across the wide room with that easy grace which so few men possess. Norton stood under a weird gray painting by Corot, his arms held tensely at his sides, his eyes burning feverishly.

"Bon soir, Billy. Grand old night outside. Half drunk with moonshine,—New York, not the kind from Kentucky." Langley laughed quietly at his own joke and reached out his hand.

Norton had intended, in a half delirious way, to wait until all the guests had assembled before he meted out vengeance to this man but the hot blood that was swirling through his brain refused to wait. He looked with glazed eyes at the outstretched hand for a silent instant then with an ominous calm he said:

"How much longer did you think you could play the game you have been playing, without my finding you out?"

Langley started. His hand fell inertly.

"You know, then?"

The coolness of the man almost took away Norton's self-control.

"Yes. I know. The thing that I marvel at is that I did not kill you when you entered that door over there."

Langley's surprised face went a little white.

"The—the shock has been a bit too much for you, old boy. Come, brace up, the others will be here in a moment. You're not yourself."

"Am I not? Well, whoever I am, I want my guests to-night to know the whole story before I have my little taste of vengeance."

"But, Norton, it is quite unnecessary that they should know. We've kept it quiet so far and now when——"

"By God! What kind of a dog are you? Do you think——"

Langley put out his hand and laid it restrainingly on Norton's arm. The enraged man shook it off with savage ferocity.

"Winifred Blaine told me this morning what everybody but the poor deluded husband has known for weeks. I saw your note. My wife lost it last night at Eleanor Rollins's. I wouldn't believe it. I came home and I arrived just in time to hear my wife tell you that she would see you at 'the usual place, within the hour.' I have been in Hell since. I remained in this house only because I knew that you were coming and I wanted to give my last guests a surprise. If you are not careful I will not be able to save it for them. God! What a cur you are!"

Norton's voice was hoarse but utterly lacking in emotion. He looked at the man before him with a face void of feeling or expression and Langley, who stood leaning against a table in dumb astonishment, wondered if he suddenly had gone mad.

"You—you wreck my happiness—my home,—you debauch my wife—and then you come to me—you DARE to come to me and say that it is not necessary for our

friends to know the shameful truth since you have managed it thus far without them! You——”

“Stop!” Langley’s voice was like a warning hiss of a snake.

When the horrible things this man was saying to him had penetrated his bewildered brain Langley sprang at his host’s throat with that one word which in itself was superfluous as his long fingers closed around the neck of his half-mad host the moment they were within reach of it. There was a struggle, during which the butler had rapped twice at the door and gone away wondering.

Langley was much the stronger of the two men. He was lithe and quick as a panther and it was but a moment before he had Norton pressed against the wall, his arms pinned behind him. For a second he breathed rather heavily, then with an effort he moved his white lips and spoke.

“You! You talk about men DARING to do things, yet you DARED to believe wrong of the purest, most innocent woman in the world! For that alone you ought to die and I’d see that you did were it not that you are the thing SHE loves.”

Billy’s face lighted for an instant with a wonderful look of joy. For just an instant Hope flickered in his burning eyes. Then the light and hope both died out and a look of madness took their place.

“Listen to me, Billy Norton. Men like you do not deserve women like Eve. You want playthings. You want dolls. You don’t want real women. You’re like the poor fool in Ibsen’s Doll-House. You starve your wives. They’re not permitted to be helpmates. They’re compelled to be dolls. You never talked with Eve about anything that would bring out the woman in her. You starved her natural desire to ‘help’ if it were only by talking your affairs over with you.”

Norton moved and Langley pressed him back again to the wall.

"I'm not through yet. I've only started. Eve went along, playing mistress in a house where servants did things without orders—where a butler and housekeeper did the hiring and firing—where she was expected to be nothing more than an animate thing on which her husband could hang jewels and fine clothes and where people could bring their most flattering words unrebuked until it would have been small wonder if she had resorted to the sordid things to which most of the doll-women *do* resort. She flirted and coquetted. But that was all. Then one day—just three days after your return from abroad—when you were out at your precious stables in Connecticut, the president of your musty old bank telephoned that he wished to see you on important business. Eve tried to get you by 'phone and when she failed she went herself to the bank. She told me afterward that she had a premonition that something was vitally wrong. Mr. Van Kurtz was reticent, but Eve in her inimitable way wormed the whole thing out of the old fellow before he was aware that he was telling anything. Your dear friend and college chum had disappeared. So also had some negotiable securities and a great many American dollars."

A look of horror shot into Norton's pale face.

Langley loosed his grip on his host's throat and pushed him contemptuously into a chair, where his head fell forward to his chest. Langley saw the horror in the bloodless face but he saw, too, the look of wild joy that had come with returning faith. Horror and joy! They were surely strange companions where a few minutes before had been immobility.

"Eve, like the woman she is, saw her first chance to do something for you. The mother instinct is strong in most women—in *all* good women. Eve saw her chance to save you much humiliation and perhaps a financial disaster. She wrung from every man who knew of the thief's disappearance a promise of secrecy for a limited time. Of all the world, *your* ignorance

of the thing should be guarded most carefully. But she needed advice. It was then that I came into the thing, not altogether to save you,—although you were my friend and I would have gone far to have served you—but chiefly because the woman who needed my help was the woman for whom I would gladly die. We traced the man, inch by inch, from the bank to the Adirondacks. There for a time we lost the trail. Day after day we drove my racer at its limit of speed to the place where our clews had abruptly run into the ground. I wanted to go alone but Eve insisted upon helping. She was eager to be the one to save you loss and disgrace, and day after day she sat beside me, straining her goggled eyes down the road ahead of us. Catching her breath with a little gasp whenever we sighted a long red car. We had followed your old college friend's circuitous get-away by frequent inquiries about a long red car with a white gasoline tank. He was not very careful about details, that friend of yours. He seemed to have overlooked the possibilities of the interested parties making inquiries concerning his newly acquired long red car. When he left his hat and coat with a farewell note on Brooklyn Bridge he was thoroughly satisfied with his own ingenuity and cleverness. When he motored to the outskirts of the city and boldly stopped at a road-house, where he waited until morning that he might read and chuckle over the account of his suicide in the newspapers, he was really making clews for Eve and me, although he didn't in the least suspect it."

Langley paused and smiled reminiscently. He drew forth a gold cigarette case and coolly lighted a cigarette. Norton's burning eyes mutely begged him to go on, but, as we already know, Carryl Langley reveled in the suspense of a listener. He ignored the beseeching eyes and with a fine air of ennui flung himself into a chair and for an instant watched the glow at the end of his cigarette. Norton made a move as if to rise and Langley

motioned him back, resuming, as he did so, his narrative.

"Things *do* shape themselves into queer fashions sometimes. Now it usually happens that an officious newspaper reporter is right there on the job when some poor devil wants to shuffle off this mortal coil and he is always willing to help the work along, the story is better if it is well stage-managed, and before the suicide is quite dead there's an extra out about it. I am presuming that he was a personage of note,—some one driven to such an extremity by too much wealth or too much guilt. They mean the same thing sometimes. The press has no more time for the man who commits suicide, because he is tragically without either, than has the public. In the event of the former there is an eulogistic extra, with a million newsboys shouting the suicide's name. In the event of the latter there is a one line death notice of an 'unidentified man' stuck in some corner of the paper that is without advertising value. The men——"

"For God's sake cut the verbosity and tell me all that happened!"

Norton had sprung from his chair with maddened, tantalizing nerves goading him on to wresting the story from the narrator's throat. The tremendous animal strength of the other man offering him no invitation, however, he fell to pacing the floor with nervous energy.

For an instant Langley smiled with relish. Then suddenly a wave of pity for this big, overgrown boy swept over him.

"I'll be brief, Norton. Sit down."

Mechanically his host obeyed.

"It happened that fate twisted things this time. The hungry press which usually seems to know of a man's intention to suicide before the man himself does didn't happen to be on the job the night your friend left his hat and coat on the bridge. But there did happen to be near the spot the old night watchman of your musty

old bank. He was on his way to work when he found the relics of the 'dear departed.' He read the note without giving so much as a glimpse of it to any of the bridge officers. The signature shocked the man into a condition resembling intelligence. He carried off the things and stopped at the first telephone and called up the president of your bank. Of course they could not afford notoriety. They kept it quiet. It was the following day that their loss was discovered and they telephoned to your house. We traced the thief at last to a box of a hunting lodge up there in the mountains. We——"

"Yes—you——"

"We made him give up the gold and its equivalent. Your wife, whom you have never been able to persuade to touch a gun, held a big bulldog revolver of mine leveled at the beast while he and I dug up his treasure box from the spot where he had buried it back of the house." Langley closed his eyes and again he saw the slender girlish figure holding without a tremor an ugly pug-nosed revolver. "We brought him back to the city and put him aboard a tramp steamer with a cordial not-to-be-ignored invitation to stay the remainder of his days in some other land."

"Then the—the bank——"

"Was properly fixed up to-day so far as her gallivanting finances are concerned and nobody except its officials, your wife, you, myself, and the thief know that it has been trembling."

Norton was on his feet once more and both Langley's hands were clasped in his own two feverish ones. For more than a second neither man spoke. Langley had nothing further to say and his host's heart and throat were too full for words.

"Man! Man! What your wonderful cool-headedness has done for me I could never have done for myself!" Norton had found his voice at last, but it was choked and husky. "The crowd, our nasty little world, Lang-

ley, they saw you and Eve together so much and they—gossiped. They gossiped—about one of God's noble-men and one of His angels. And I—God!—I believed it!"

"I suppose it did look bad, old boy, but domestic happiness is too often wrecked on circumstantial evidence. Be more *sure* next time, Norton. You——"

The door had opened softly and Eve in a filmy lace gown stood framed in the doorway. With a wild cry that was more than half sob Billy Norton leaped across the room and snatched the slim little figure up in his arms. His hot lips kissed again and again her eyes, her lips, her yellow hair.

"Eve—Eve! My first woman! My little girl! Mine! Mine! Mine!"

"You know, Billy?"

Eve's shining eyes looked into his with a new tenderness. A mother-tenderness that comes when the young of a female has been threatened by some hideous danger and she has been able to save it. Eve's face was glorified. Some new light shone from it that had never been there before.

Langley, for the time quite forgotten, strolled aimlessly about the far end of the room, pausing now and then with well assumed interest before some picture and whistling a gay little tune from one of Broadway's latest musical successes. If his face was a little white or his fingers trembled a bit when he flicked the ash from his cigarette no one saw, and when, a few minutes later, other guests began to arrive it was Carryl Langley who played at host. Norton, as he put it, "has gone completely off his head just because he, Langley, and Eve had ended successfully a month's search for a much prized mare that had been stolen from Billy's stables."

Their little world spun round on its axis and said "Ah" and "Oh" disappointedly. Its bubble of gossip had burst and—there—was—nothing—at all—in—it.

Billy and Eve went about amongst their guests in a

dazed sort of way. Smiling inanely and answering "yes" where they should have said "no" and "no" where they should have said "yes." Billy was foolishly happy and he showed it.

"In the seventh heaven of joy, all because Langley and his wife have succeeded in getting back a silly old mare that went off and got herself stolen," bubbled Mrs. Burns into Winifred's delicately tinted and powdered ear.

"It was a most accommodating mare," drawled that lady with suggestive sweetness. "It stayed stolen a whole month."

She opened and closed her fan, gazed across its top at the glorified face of her young hostess and then eyed her neighbor intently. Obviously the seed she had cast in that gossip's direction had found no lodging in her busy, marcelled head. Mrs. Burns was staring at Eve Norton with positive delight in her pale eyes. Winifred Blaine shrugged her bare shoulders disdainfully. She had hoped for better things from Mrs. Burns.

"It would be funny, wouldn't it, my dear, if Carryl Langley had known where that much prized mare was all the time?"

This time the younger woman's voice was acidulous. But Mrs. Burns for once in her busy life was immune to the insidious germ of suspicion.

"I beg your pardon——!" Some one was touching Winifred's arm and she turned and looked up into Langley's calm eyes.

"I really *didn't* know where Billy's mare was and it—er—is not a perfectly wise thing for any one to attempt to throw suspicion on some one else. It might—er—rebound, don't you know. *You* didn't by any chance know where it was all the time, did you?"

The woman colored angrily and bit her lip.

"I understand. You needn't attempt to use force. I'll not throw anything that is likely to rebound."

The dinner was a very gay affair and it was Langley

who kept the ball of conversation rolling, Langley who laughed loudest and longest at the witticisms and dinner stories, Langley who shot the sharpest repartee across the table, Langley who watched with a crooked smile the gay guests taking their laughing departure and it was Langley who, avoiding his happy and grateful host and hostess and any words of appreciation they might want to pour over him, crept silently from the remainder of the crowd at a time when it happened to be at its gayest and—went out into the night.

CHAPTER XXI

FOR more than an hour Allen Hamilton had paced up and down the pier. Impatiently he glanced again and again at his watch. Anxiously, hungrily he glanced again and again out to sea. He fumbled and twisted the buttons of his coat. He swished with his stick the ends that stuck out from coils of rope which lay in his path. The gray at his temples had grown a trifle grayer, but his mouth was less stern and his eyes had in them a boyish eagerness where had once been a glint of steel.

When at last the great ship slipped quietly into her berth and handkerchiefs, scores of them, began waving on dock and on deck Allen Hamilton went suddenly dizzy with the rush of blood to his head.

"I'm a damned idiot! I'm senile! She will laugh when she sees that I flush like a schoolboy. She will laugh!"

He pushed his way through the crowds and reached the gangplank just as Hazel and old M. Dupont started down it. Hamilton stood with bared head and staring eyes. He knew her. She was the same girl whom he had found that day in the long ago in Central Park, but—had—there—ever—been anything so beautiful?

That slim, straight figure coming toward him,—with its small dark head, its vividly red mouth, its velvety black eyes with their long silken fringes pressed in startling contrast against the ivory skin, its proud poise,—was *his* little girl whom he had sent to a foreign land and who was only just now getting back under his wing.

In the brief space of time consumed in reaching the dock Hazel, too, had thought many things. All the

years of her young life swept before her. They had been strange years. She had been a pawn of fate. She was returning now to place in her benefactor's gentle hands all the years of her future. Her eyes met those of Allen Hamilton suddenly as they searched the crowd below.

The next instant she was beside him.

"Jean!"

"Allen!"

The man's arms cried out for her but the man only clasped her slim hands in a tense grip and held her off at arm's length while he gazed into the sweet upturned face.

This was the girl who had come into his home and made for herself a place in his lonely heart. Her letters came back to him in a flood of memory. She had rejuvenated him, this slender young girl! Something tightened in his throat and something primitive stirred in his heart.

"Jean! Jean, you must never leave me again! You must——"

The primitive instincts of a cave man who loves had sprung into life, but the girl's startled eyes brought civilization back to its own. Allen Hamilton's flesh went cold. Instantly he recovered his self-control. He had frightened her! Boor!

He smiled down at her reassuringly and extended a cordial hand to the little master who stood beside the girl looking with reminiscent eyes at this tall, distinguished man who was Her son.

He was like Her, decided the little man as later they rode up town in a big limousine. And as Allen Hamilton scarcely took his eyes from his protégée's face during the drive, M. Dupont had ample time and opportunity to study his features.

He had Her broad forehead and gray eyes. There the resemblance stopped. But it had gone far enough for the little white-haired master who had ridden down

this very street half a century ago with a wonderful girl who had a broad white forehead and sweet gray eyes.

M. Dupont was happy. The gay butterfly lady who was Her daughter he had met and found wanting. She did not resemble that other girl of a half century ago. Her hair was the same but—she was like the father, he had decided,—gay and irresponsible. This man opposite him had a soul like Hers and he was receiving messages from Her through it. He was indeed happy. Her son and the young girl who had brought new life to him and his disintegrating studio! Mon Dieu! What more could he desire?

There were so many things to ask and so many things to tell that Hazel thought she would never get it all asked or said. She looked at the crowded thoroughfares with enthusiastic interest and rattled along in an effervescent monologue, to the keen delight of the man beside her. He felt youth stealing surreptitiously back into his heart. He felt a beautiful companionship wrapping itself round about him. The emptiness and void of other years were being laughed at by the things surging through him.

“—do you think so?”

The man did not have the remotest idea whether he was expected to “think so” or not. He had not listened to her. Her words had not mattered really. It was her voice, her tangible nearness that counted. He ventured a monosyllabic reply in the affirmative.

“You do?” The girl turned reproachful eyes upon him and immediately he was contritely saying that he had really meant “no.”

“Oh, Big Man! Do you play the game that way too? Why don’t you say that you were not listening? I asked you if you would not tire of me soon, mon cher ami, and you said ‘yes.’ If you try to be super-civilized with me I’ll—I’ll get another dog like Tige,”—she swallowed something and her eyes grew misty—“and run away.”

When they drew up a little later before the imposing house of Eleanor Rollins and her brother, Hazel gave a quick little cry and her hand trembled where it rested on Allen's arm. As he lifted her out her eyes traveled up the stone wall to the balcony or sleeping porch and her small white teeth caught her red underlip. How long ago it seemed since that tired young girl and her dog had slept there! How long ago! How long she had lived in a foreign land! Now at last she was home. This beautiful house was her home. This best of men was her benefactor, her protector.

She patted the man's arm affectionately and the man's arm tingled and his pulse throbbed.

There was a scurrying of high French heels down the wide reception hall and Hazel, whose eyes had not yet accustomed themselves to the dim light of the interior of the house which they had just entered, was lost for a breathless instant in Eleanor's embrace.

"Oh, you wonderful little kitten, I've needed you so!" It was like Eleanor that in her first words she would express her *need* of her.

Hazel pressed a cool cheek against one of her friend's warm ones and observed:

"But there is more roundness here where there were little hollows not long ago. Perhaps the climate here has helped you. No? Then perhaps it is Allen, or maybe just New Yawk." Hazel drawled the last word in such clever mimicry of certain inhabitants of that place that Allen and M. Dupont who were a few steps in the rear laughed.

Eleanor released the girl and greeted M. Dupont, for whom she had never had any great liking.

"You will show him up to his rooms, Allen?" With this to her brother and another smile to the little professor she turned again to Hazel.

"I never dreamed that I could want anybody as I have wanted you."

She slipped her arm through that of the girl's and

led the way upstairs. At the door of the east guest chamber she hesitated.

"We've had this room aired and put into order for you. It is the one which you occupied before and Allen has allowed no one to have access to it since save the housekeeper and himself. I believe it is just as it was when you left it. Perhaps"—Eleanor went on thoughtfully—"I had better leave you here. You will like to go in alone?"

"Yes."

There was an unmistakable note of gratefulness in the girl's voice and Eleanor with an understanding smile turned away and made her way down the corridor.

Slowly Hazel opened the door of the east guest chamber. Slowly, very slowly she entered the room and closed the door behind her. Eleanor had said that she believed the room was just as she had left it and—it was. Over there was the same gilded chair where she had seated herself so gingerly, fearing its spindle legs would break under her weight, while she and Tiger had devoured with their eyes the grandeur surrounding them. There was the beautiful bed of carved rosewood and it was covered with the same exquisite lace spread. And there on the low dressing-table—the girl caught her breath and her eyes dilated—was a much wrinkled scarlet hair ribbon. She remembered distinctly having left on that dressing-table the two ribbons that had served to secure the ends of her long braids. One of those ribbons was there yet. How surprised the girl would have been if she could have known that the other scarlet ribbon had been for several years locked in a drawer of Allen Hamilton's desk with a great many letters bearing the Paris postmark.

She crossed the room and opened wide the closet door.

Yes. These things, too, were just as she had left them. Suspended from hangers which were hooked on a brass rod were the garments she had brought with

her to the city. The shabby little hat with its faded cotton flowers. The inexpensive cotton dress with its conspicuous patch in front near the hem, the more brilliant color of which told of fewer trips to the wash tub than the cloth surrounding it. The coarse, high-necked night robe. And there, also, was the long-sleeved gingham apron. On the floor were two rusty, impudent looking shoes that had trudged a great many miles over a tide-pounded beach and that had never wearied of carrying the little tin sprinkler from well to rose bush. To her excited fancy the drooping buttons were so many eyes looking backward into those other days—those far-off days of her childhood!

Suddenly she sank to the floor with a dry little sob. A muffled bark came in to her from the balcony. She sat up quickly with wide, startled eyes. Coming toward her from the half open glass door leading from the room to balcony was—a shaggy yellow, mongrel dog.

The girl wondered vaguely if this home-coming had been too much for her tired nerves and brain. Surely, surely she was not seeing aright!

She brushed one cold little hand across her eyes. Then she looked again, expecting the apparition to be gone. But it was there. Here! For already a clammy nose was touching her fingers and two bleary, bloodshot eyes were looking straight into hers. Fascinated, dumb and rigid, she gazed back into the two red eyes.

The dog whined reproachfully and poked his cold black nose under her nerveless hand.

"Tiger," she whispered with awe settling around her heart.

The dog wagged its tail delightedly and whined again. In another moment the girl would have collapsed but the door had opened softly and Allen Hamilton had come into the room.

"Oh," she cried, "is it Tige, or—or am I seeing things that are—are not real?"

She had leaped to her feet and without thought or

consciousness of the act had run to the man's arms like a frightened child.

Allen held her close and as he spoke he stroked her dusky head tenderly.

"Poor child! No wonder it frightened you. I told Eleanor to tell you that a grandson of Tige's was waiting for you here but it was like her to want to surprise you. The moment she told me that she had permitted you to come in here alone I hurried to you."

The girl looked up at him with velvety orbs from which all fear and shock were disappearing and into which was coming a joyful glow.

"You got him for *me*?"

The dog stood before them wagging his ragged tail appealingly.

"Yes, Jean. I found him out there near your old home two years ago and he's been a sort of companion to me ever since. A neighbor out there gave me a portion of his pedigree, at least one side of it,—Tige's side. Like father like son, you know. History repeats itself. So do dogs. He looked so much like his grandfather that I brought him back home with me. The neighbor wouldn't accept any money for him. In fact, he came near offering me some for taking him away. He always sleeps on the balcony there and he haunts that closet where your clothes hang. I've told him all about you. We sit here sometimes when the rest of the house is still and talk about our little girl and I—I think—I am *sure* that he knew you when he saw you just now."

The dog threw back his head and gave vent to a quick, sharp bark which corroborated as plainly as could be the things Allen had told her.

The girl struggled out of the man's arms and throwing her own arms around the shaggy neck of the dog pressed her face against his jagged, drooping ear.

"Tige! Tige! You were here waiting for me all this time and I didn't know! I didn't know!"

Allen turned his head and blinked his eyes toward

the sunlit window. For a long time the girl knelt there on the floor, her face buried in the streaked yellow hair of the mongrel dog. Then she lifted her head and asked in a quavering little voice:

"You go out to—to my old home sometimes?"

"Yes. Often."

"Does it look just as it did—when I—left it?"

"Just the same."

"The rose bush,—is it dead?"

"No. I—I have had it cared for."

The man colored guiltily. Being made to confess a good act shamed him painfully.

"And the tree, there on the bluff—has it tumbled into the sea yet? It was on the verge of falling off with the crumbling earth under it when—when I—ran—away."

Allen's face flushed a deeper shade.

"I had it banked. It is quite secure now."

Hazel rose from her knees and came swiftly to him. Her face was glowing and her eyes were moist. There never seemed to be tears in those dark windows of her soul, but often they were moist, like the heart of a flower wet with dew.

"You are so good, dear big man! So wonderfully good! Shall I ever be able to repay you? Shall I ever be out of your debt?"

The man took the outstretched hand in both his big ones and smiled gently down at her. There was nothing in his face but kindness but the veins at his temples swelled and throbbed.

"You are going to sing for me, little gypsy, and you are going to be my little bodyguard. It will be one of your duties to see that I am well protected against wind, rain and designing females."

"Oh, we'll be glad to boss you, won't we, Tige?" The dog lifted his good ear affirmatively.

"To begin with, young man, I know by your caved-in shirt front that you are hungry, so run away and dress

for dinner and I'll have a little private conference with Tige as to your future."

There was a bit more of banter, light and playful, then Allen Hamilton left the room.

Her voice continued to play little trills in his ears as he strode away to his own chamber. Her face still looked up into his with its moist flower-like eyes, her red, red lips still haunted him but with all his consciousness of her, his seeing and hearing her, he was most conscious of the touch of her. The feel of her slender, pliant body still sung in tiny, yet powerful, currents in the flesh of his arms.

CHAPTER XXII

MAY I come in?"

There had come a rap on the door, closely followed by Eleanor's voice. Hazel's bare arms fell away from Tiger's neck and the dog whined reproachfully and turned toward the door with a sniff.

The girl arose from the low divan and brushing from the soft satin folds of her gown a few coarse yellow hairs which Tiger had inconsiderately rubbed off on her, she called an invitation to Eleanor to enter.

The woman paused in the door and looked at Tiger with frank dislike in her blue eyes. The dog stared back at her with sullen antagonism and a rigid tail.

"It is easy to see that you and Tige are not exactly on intimate terms. Have you quarreled?"

Eleanor shrugged her white shoulders.

"It is necessary to be on speaking terms to quarrel."

Hazel laughed.

"Then you are not even on speaking terms with each other?"

Eleanor Rollins moved across the room and sank gracefully into a wide upholstered chair.

"No. He—he seems to have some sort of grudge against me. I might have tolerated his grandfather, but this ill-mannered thing—Never!"

Hazel smiled her amusement into the heart of a rose. Tiger glanced up at her with gentle appeal and she winked a solemn eye at him. He was not quite sure just what that wink meant but after a moment's deep thought he interpreted it to mean that his mistress shared his dislike for this woman with the doll eyes and hair who never patted his head and who drew her skirts close around her whenever she had to pass him

in narrow quarters. With a glad sense of satisfaction that his pretty mistress who had not disdained to bury her lovely face in his shaggy hair had sent him that silent message he elevated his only obedient ear and made his way haughtily to the balcony.

Hazel fastened the rose in her hair and the red petals nestled against the soft, dark waves as if they knew how ravishingly beautiful the contrast would be.

"You wonderful little gypsy! The men will go mad about you to-night. Allen was stunned by your beauty in that traveling suit this afternoon. Like all men, he thinks dressing for dinner means simply changing one's street or afternoon garments for the things which convention bids us don for evening. Few men understand that most of us don things from little toilet boxes, that would be too glaring in honest daylight but which make us younger and more beautiful under the merciful charity of softly shaded electric bulbs. But you! You are another being and without the aid of the vanity pots. You are you, sans jewels and paint. Wait until Allen sees you to-night!"

Hazel bowed mockingly.

"You embarrass me, madame. It is not good to tell me these things; you may spoil me. I may take my dog and run away in search of the throne which awaits, in far-off unknown lands, such goddesses as I. Don't you know that in novels the girls who are beautiful are always beggars until somebody discovers in them long lost princesses?" There was mock gravity on the piquant face and Eleanor sprang to her feet and caught the shimmering satin draped figure in her arms.

"My dear little sister! Nothing could spoil you. Nothing. You are my sensible little balance wheel. With you home to-night and another new happiness in my heart I feel that I am standing on the summit of all that is good and desirable in life."

Hazel drew back and looked wonderingly into the older woman's face. What she saw there was radiating

joy. A warm flush was on either cheek and a new light was in the clear blue eyes.

"I know what this other new happiness is," she said quietly. "It is——"

Eleanor looked back into the girl's face fearlessly and smiled encouragingly.

"—the Duc de Gourman?"

"Yes."

"He is in America?"

"Yes. He arrived three weeks ago."

"And——?"

Eleanor's face flushed a warmer pink.

"We are to announce our engagement to-night."

Hazel put her arms silently about the other woman's neck and pressed her red lips to the carefully rouged cheek. For a time they stood silent. Each busy with her own thoughts and each conscious of the things the silence said. Then the girl kissed the rouged cheek again and released her friend.

"Are there to be many guests at dinner?"

"Not many. Most of them you know. He—the Duc de Gourman—has told me about the little note which you sent him. He has kept it as a sort of mascot, he says, and he—he gives to it a great deal of credit for our happiness. He—will be glad to see you."

"And I, too, will be glad to see him."

There followed an interval of confidences on Eleanor's part and sympathetic remarks on Hazel's. Then the two beautiful women (neither of whom was much more than a bud of a girl) went down to the drawing-room, where Allen Hamilton and M. Dupont awaited them.

The guests when they had arrived vied with each other in their welcoming of the dark-eyed girl who was the protégée of their host. The women raved over her openly, the men secretly. She was like a wild rose brought from a country roadside to a hothouse where flowers bloomed unnaturally.

Allen Hamilton's heart thrilled with possessive pride.

His eyes seldom wandered from the young girl's face. He had an insane desire to touch with his lips the lashes that embroidered her white lids and ivory cheeks. He wanted to touch with his big fingers, which had never learned caressing gentleness, never having had anything to caress, the soft mass of dusky hair. And oh, how madly he wanted to hold that slim little body in his lonely arms again!

Once when Brice Mathews was looking down at her where they stood together in a shadowy corner, he had been in an agony of pain at which he bellowed mentally to no avail. Brice Mathews' face was very pale and one had only to look at the expression in his eyes to know what lay in his heart. The girl was smiling up at him with mute pleading and one knew by the passion in the man's face that the pleading was in vain. The man was pouring out the old, old story and the plea in the girl's smile was powerless to stop him.

From infancy Allen Hamilton had been a fine product of ultra-civilization. But now as he looked, the inbred fineness suddenly sloughed off and he stood in naked primitiveness with all the instincts of primal man. He wanted to catch up his girl, his little Jean, in his strong arms and carry her off to a cave where other men could not look at her with passion-burning eyes. He wanted to take her away from all this silly glitter to a place where two and two made four. She had written him numerous times that she didn't like the game as others played it. She couldn't figure as did nearly everybody else and get correct results. He wanted to take her far away to a place where they could play the game as God had intended that it should be played. Love! That was the one great thing. He loved her. He had never had anything to love before, and now somebody was sure to steal this thing from him. His life had been barren. What right had this other man, or *any* man, to rob him of the first beautiful joy that ever had been his? These other men had intimate family love—close

friends who understood them. Love was forever in their paths and they had but to pick it up. They had had fertile lives while his own had been barren. Barren!

He looked with hot eyes at the girl and man in the shadowy corner and this man whose stern face and bellying voice had for so long covered his innate gentleness wanted suddenly to kill. He could not even call her "Jean" because of these mannikins about him. He must call her by another name, a name by which these people knew her. Bah! She belonged to him! What did these automatons round about him matter? He would take her——

She was moving toward him. She was alone. The other man was gone. Her sweet face was saddened and her eyes were looking imploringly at him. She was grieved. That was enough for this man whose life had been one long self-effacement. Instantly the tenderness of civilization covered him once more and for the time being his primitiveness was smothered.

"Take me into the conservatory, Allen, and talk my melancholy away."

She placed one slim hand on his arm with calm assurance of his compliance with her wish. He pressed the little hand tight to his side. Would he take her to the conservatory? Would he? Would he not, indeed, have taken her to Timbuctoo had she asked him? Conservatories never had meant anything to him except what the name itself implied. He had never listened to romance trickling out of a half-hidden fountain. He had never inhaled sentiment with which the fragrance of hot-house flowers were pungent. The only part Allen Hamilton had ever played in the conservatory game was paying the gardener and loving the flowers. Most of his visits to this small tropical bit of his house were made in the early mornings when his sister still slept and few of the servants were astir.

To-night as he sat in that glass covered room he

longed to tell this girl of his love. He yearned to ask her to give herself to him, to allow him to teach her to care for him. It was not the usual conservatory intoxication that fired his blood. He was conscious of nothing but the gorgeous exotic beside him. He was drunk with longing for her. Yet with all the burning in his veins the sadness of her face kept him silent. Also far down in some reasoning corner of his heart something told him to wait. It was not the foolish conventional law which forbids a man to speak of his love to a woman who is, or thinks she is, under obligations to him, and more especially if that woman is under his own roof. Rather was it a fear of adding to the sadness which already shadowed her face.

"Oh, it is soothing to be here alone with you," she cried. "I—I feel as if I can't breathe sometimes when I'm in the midst of a crowd like that back there! I suppose I'll never be anything but a heathen so far as society goes."

"You revolt against all the things which always have filled me with rebellion," he smiled. "I used to read your letters almost with the feeling that I had written them myself."

Hazel's face lighted. He understood. He had always understood.

"Tell me, do you ever feel as though you were in a wax-works when you see the figures about you all dressed in their conventional clothes, making their stiff, studied gestures, the limits of which are carefully considered, and smiling their regulated, uniform smiles? I do. I've wanted, hundreds of times, to make faces at them. And oh, Allen, your new butler—he is a wonderful piece of mechanism! Did he catch it from his 'superiors' or do you have to wind him up and—does he ever get out of order?"

Hamilton laughed. With effervescent youth like this in his house he felt ridiculously, deliriously young. He forgot the gray at his temples. He forgot the years

that stalked like accusing ghosts behind him. He forgot everything except that something had come at last into his life and had made it whole.

"The new butler is a prize of Eleanor's. I don't know whether she got him by outbidding the heads of other households or won him at bridge. He *is* pretty much like a wax figure. Confidentially, he gets on my nerves."

"He shan't get on mine," vowed the girl. "I'll keep them where he can't get at them. But honestly, Big Chief, I'm afraid I'll succumb to the temptation to poke my finger in his eye just to see if he is real."

That night long after the last guest had gone and the house had settled down for the night, or rather for the morning, Allen sat in his den, a deep, Moorish room, and lived over again that half hour in the conservatory. He puffed away at his empty pipe and dreamed sweet dreams. They were the kind of dreams that should have come with his first pipe—with college days or the evenings that followed them. But they had evaded him then. They had flitted past him like flying arrows and had gone through the hearts of the other fellows—his classmates. They had been arrows of golden joy for some and of poison for others, but he had envied none of the targets, at least not consciously. To-night all those delayed dreams were his and his added years made them none the less sweet and wonderful.

Next week, next Wednesday night, she was to sing! She had wished him to wait until then to hear her voice, and he trembled as he waited. If—if her voice did not carry to the public the quality which it demanded—she would—*What* would she—He dared think no further. On that night he would tell her of his love and if her voice failed, as he knew it would, he would take her in his arms and tell her how little it mattered. How little anything mattered—anything but his great love for her.

She had been so pleased about Tiger. And Tiger had

seemed to know her. Small wonder, since he had spent hours in that east guest chamber talking to him about her or reading her letters to him. He remembered now how the dog had grown to recognize with a single sniff the letters that came from her and how he told of his knowledge with little joyful barks.

They would have a long ride to-morrow, or, to be more exact, to-day. Just he and she and the dog. Perhaps they would go down to the farm and water the rose bush that was old and gnarled. He would get the water and she should sprinkle it. And, perhaps, on their return they would stop in the park and sit on the same bench where she had sat that day long ago—that day when Fate had brought him upon her. And—And——

He started and his empty pipe fell with a clatter to the floor.

There was a pat-pat of light feet on the stairs outside and a fresh young voice was saying:

"It's a glorious day, Tige, and everybody's asleep except us. Funny, isn't it, Tige, that people prowl around o' nights and sleep when there's a sun like that over there in the east and blue like this overhead and—and trees full of scarlet and golden leaves. Tige, don't you ever dare go in for society. You'd be an awful bounder to begin with and you'd chew up your collars and rub your hair off on ladies' gowns and—and ever so many other things which gentlemen don't do. Besides," the voice was growing fainter as though its owner was getting farther away, "you wouldn't know how to do the *ungentlemanly* things that some men do. If you ever try to break into the social game, Tige, I'll humiliate you by feeding you dog biscuit, which, by the way, is the food the fancy poodles and other society canines get instead of real meat. Wouldn't that make you feel pretty small, Tige?"

Came a quick, sharp bark from far down the corridor.

"Well, then, don't ever bore me with talk about your

stables or your newest motorcar and please, Tiger dear, don't ever try to squeeze my hand or write poems about my eyes. I hate——"

There came the creak of the heavy front doors, then silence.

CHAPTER XXIII

FROM gallery to pit the house was packed. Fashion, wealth and aristocracy had filled the seats. These three component parts of society always vie with each other in the worship of music and whether that worship is sincere or affected, whether it is natural or cultivated does not appear to matter. The result is the same. They manage to keep the masters of music for themselves.

All day Hazel had moved about in a trance. Eleanor trembled for her, and Allen dared not even *think* of the night. It was the little music master who followed her about all day with a whip of duty.

"For him you must sing as you have never sung before. For him you must try. Think—Think, how much you owe him. To-night you go into the field to begin his harvest for him." Duty! Harvest! Reap! Debt! *Debt!* DEBT! All day long he had lashed her with these whips and now as she stood before a long mirror in a flower-banked dressing-room the apathy and stage-fright that had enthralled her since morning were suddenly gone.

Whatever lay out there beyond the footlights for her she would take calmly. She would not whimper nor cry. She would take defeat, if that was what waited for her out there, like—like a man. She smiled. Women usually made such a fuss over things. She wanted the strength of a man to-night. Her heart pounded but she refused to listen to it. With boyish bravado she hummed a little tune as she fastened about her slim white throat the string of pearls which her benefactor had sent to her on her last birthday. On one white arm was the sapphire bracelet and on a finger a scintillating

ring. Allen had asked her only that day why she was not wearing any of the gifts which he had sent her and he had smiled a rather wobbly smile when she had told him.

With assumed vanity she turned her head this way and that as she watched her reflection in the glass but what she saw was not the cloud of creamy lace which enveloped the slender figure nor the pale face with its startling streak of red from which gleamed little pearls that outshone those at her throat, nor even the glistening jewels.

What she saw was a vast audience, not of human beings, but of critics, merciless critics, and a little shiver swept over her.

Eleanor and Eve Norton had begged to be permitted to help her there in the dressing-room. But she had gently, yet with unmistakable firmness, told them that she preferred being alone. She had not even desired nor allowed the services of Eleanor's maid.

M. Dupont had come to the room a few minutes before the orchestra had begun playing and she had listened to him without knowing what he said. She had answered him without knowing in the least what she was saying. And he had gone away again apparently satisfied.

Once she had crept out and peered through the tiny hole in the curtain and her blood had gone cold in her veins and her limbs had been suddenly paralyzed. The place was a checkerboard of bare white shoulders, jeweled necks, black cloth shoulders and patches of white shirt fronts. The bare white shoulders looked hard and scornful. The black cloth ones were grim and cold. They were so many executioners, eagerly waiting for her to put her head on the block. Of course there were friends there too. But they filled only a small part of the many seats. They were merely her counsel. They might have had something to say at a trial but certainly their voices would have no effect at an execution.

In the box at the left were the Billy Nortons, Eleanor,

the Duc de Gourman, Brice Mathews and a few others. In the front row of the pit were several newspaper men and critics. She knew them by a sure instinct. Over there in the first box on the right, sitting close to the stage, were her two good friends, the two for whom she would soon place her head on the guillotine—M. Dupont and Allen Hamilton. Both men were pale and both looked steadily and silently at the curtain of the stage as though fascinated by the thought of what it was to give them.

Blindly and with an effort she had crept back to her dressing-room. She had had a feeling of nausea for the whole thing. She had no excuses to offer for her fears, yet a few excuses made futile efforts to be heard.

If she had been permitted to sing before people in the past she would have been less panic-stricken now. That was the one big excuse. But she refused to consider it. True, M. Dupont had insisted upon her singing only in his studio and for *no ears but his own*. But that was no reason why she should be a coward—a baby.

She leaned nearer the glass and looked deep into the hot, dry eyes.

"And if success waits out there—but no—it can't. It is defeat! Defeat! M. Dupont knew there was no chance and, poor old dear, he didn't have the heart to tell me."

Involuntarily she straightened and her red lips smiled.

"If I fail—Tiger and I will find another way to give my benefactor a harvest for the seed he has sown. Won't we, Tige?"

There was a rustling of silken things on the floor in a corner and Tiger crawled out with a shamed look like a dog that had been beaten. With drooping tail and head he slunk to the girl's side and pushed his cold nose under her hand.

"Tiger, you were the only friend I could endure having near me to-night and you—you traitor, you deserted me before the firing even began. You ran and hid your-

self under some abandoned garments of mine and left me to face the fray alone."

The dog whined piteously and his bloodshot eyes looked beseechingly up into hers.

The next instant her two arms were about his neck and her soft cheek was pressed tight against his ragged ear (whether that ragged ear was inherited or acquired in past bloody battles as had been his grandsire's nobody seemed to know).

"Forgive me, Tiger dear. I know that you felt the thing that is threatening me and that you hid, not from fear but from sorrow."

There was a rap on the door and the girl pushed the dog gently from her.

"Two minutes," came a man's gruff voice from outside.

Two minutes!

Two hundred years!

A million!

An eternity!

Suddenly her name was called. Like one in a dream she left the room, closing the door with mechanical precision behind her.

As the curtain went slowly up Allen Hamilton leaned forward breathlessly. The programme rattled in his hand like a dry parchment in a March wind. His eyes burned like living coals of fire. His brain seemed to be throbbing in unison with his pounding heart. He had staked a fortune several times on some immense production and had sat in a box on the premier night with a steady heart and a cool head. He had gone through trying business ordeals quietly and with regular pulse. But—to-night—to-night—God! What would he not give to have it already over?

M. Dupont, too, leaned forward with breathless suspense. His waxen blue-veined hands clutched the arms of his seat nervously.

With maddening slowness the curtain went up. In the

center of the stage stood a girl whose only tangible proofs of womanhood were the coiled hair and the long gown. There was an elusive childishness about her. It was not in any one feature but rather in the ensemble. The small dark head reared like a flower against the crimson velvet of the drop curtain behind her, the slender, almost boyish figure like a stalk under the flower, the ivory face with its wide eyes that looked wistfully out at the audience, the hands, the mouth, the hair, the slim throat—they were all a part in the picture which carried across the footlights the impression of childishness.

The orchestra leader smiled at her encouragingly. The audience patted its white gloved hands. She neither saw the one nor heard the other. The footlights blinded her. The checkerboard that she knew was on the other side of them was mercifully hidden from her in a blanket of darkness.

Suddenly, out of the darkness there arose, without warning, a low sun-bleached tent—and a sky and desert like two saucers,—one inverted,—meeting at the rims. A camel came into the picture, too, and stood, tall and gaunt near the tent. An Arab in native attire moved about at the right, and there, at her left, a white man—an American—was on his knees. He was monotonously touching his forehead again and again to the sand and murmuring, "Allah! Allah! Allah!"

The orchestra had sounded her note twice. The leader was getting a bit nervous. M. Dupont had made an involuntary gesture to her and Allen Hamilton had closed his eyes in an agony of suspense.

Again her opening note sounded. With it came a soft flute-like sound that closed every programme and opened every ear. It trilled up the scale and halfway back, where it held for several seconds a clear bird-like call that made every heart in the listening audience forget that the month was October—that the leaves on the trees were scarlet and gold and that frost was already in the air outside. It was spring again. The

trees were just budding and birds called to each other as they built their nests.

At the first flute-like note from the girl's slim, pearl encircled throat the house of fashion, wealth and aristocracy sat upright with startled attention, and with each succeeding note that came clear and sweet over the footlights to them a deeper silence fell upon them. They held their breath, as one individual, with wonder and awe.

In the box at the right a little white-haired Frenchman was weeping openly and without shame. His thin hands trembled with the storm of his emotion and his lips moved mutely. His companion leaned heavily against the railing in front of him, his gray eyes, dry and unwavering, fastened on the flower-like face of the girl on the stage. His programme was rolled and twisted in his hand. His hair was in disorder from wandering nervous fingers that had gone suddenly inert and still with that first sweet note. In his face there was the strange pallor that comes sometimes with sudden, overwhelming joy. In his eyes was a look which was half madness and half thanksgiving. A dry sob made its way up from his soul now and then but there came no moisture to his eyes. Sometime, perhaps when the evening was over, he would weep tears, *real* tears, but just now he was beyond anything so near the surface. Jean! His little girl!—the girl whom he loved was there on the stage before New York's most critical gathering of music devotees and their verdict could be read in their spellbound silence. She had succeeded. She had the voice of a bird. A throat of gold! And he—he had paid the architect of that wonderful voice. Suddenly he recalled the architect himself and blindly he reached out his hand and laid it over the trembling hands of M. Dupont.

"Allah! Allah! Allah!" came the monotonous chant from the man who knelt on the sands of the desert to the ears of the girl on the stage.

The song was ended. The voice trailed off into a sigh and was still.

The curtain dropped and a sound of thunder came to her from the other side of it.

She did not move. When the thunder continued and the curtain lifted again she still stood as she had stood at the end of her song. Again and again the curtain lifted and dropped. Then somebody, the manager perhaps, she could not remember just who he was, asked her to sing once more.

This time it was not a song of spring but a wild gypsy thing that tore at one's vitals and put an ache in one's heart. It cried out at times like a wounded thing and then died away in a little sob. It called for freedom and it called for love and through it all it cried, "Allah! Allah! Allah!" But that was the part which no one heard save the girl who sang it.

Once more the curtain had descended. Once more there came that thunder from the other side it. Again it was up. Then for the first time she remembered the two men in the lower right-hand box. Instantly the low sun-bleached tent and the man on the sand were gone and the strained faces of her two good friends looked up at her from the box.

That thunder! It was not a sandstorm! It was applause! Applause for her! Jean Delaine, a waif! She had succeeded! Dear little mother in Heaven, she had succeeded!

She moved toward the footlights and a prayer made its way up from her heart and on up to the little mother who, she felt sure, was glad,—oh, so glad!—for her.

She bowed again and again. But the crowds out there were not satisfied. Again she sang. Now it was a song of the sea. And her voice made of it a mad, wild thing with pounding waves and a wind that whistled over the high crests of foam.

This time when the curtain dropped a gentle hand drew her into the wings and there before her were

her two good friends, M. Dupont and Allen Hamilton.

She drew their two heads to her with a single sweep of her arms and touched a cheek of each with her poppy-red lips, and she held them close for one long convulsive moment. There were no words. There was no need of them.

But the curtain was up again and the applause was thundering across the stage to them. Holding the hands of these two men who loved her, each in his own way, she forced them onto the stage with her. There fell an expectant silence. Then the audience recognized the familiar face and figure of Allen Hamilton, New York's theatrical and operatic magnate. There was an instant burst of applause.

Allen held up his hand for silence as he bowed an acknowledgment and when the applause had subsided at last, he told them, in his deep grave voice, how proud he was, first, of his protégée's wonderful gift and, second, of the reception which New York had just given her.

An enthusiastic roar of hand-clapping spread over the house.

Also he was glad and proud, he continued, when the house was quiet once more, to present to them M. Dupont the master who had in the past given so many song-birds to the public and who had to-night given them yet another.

Poor little M. Dupont! He fumbled nervously at his waistcoat buttons and the glistening tears in the furrows of his cheeks dried with the heat of a flush. Times without number he had stood in the wings of a theater and listened to applause which some artist wished to share with him or the manager of the artist wished the artist to share with him—a hundred times had he stood in the wings when a product of his studio and his patient work beckoned to him to "take a curtain," but never before had the little white-haired man, who had given to the world so many artists, stood behind the foot-

lights with a multitude of people staring up at him.

He glanced about him in fright, as if looking for a way of escape. But there was none. The little girl, whose voice he had trained over there in a smelly side street of Paris, stood on one side of him, and Her son was on the other. He shivered and stared beseechingly into the yawning pit before him.

What he was expected to do he did not know. But he twisted a button until it came loose from the coat and rolled toward the footlights. Then he bowed very humbly and pulled the girl and the man with him toward the wings. The curtain came down hastily.

The thunder still came up to them, but none of them heard or at least was conscious of it.

The girl dragged them off to her dressing room, for, as she put it——

“Tige will just be dying to know what the executioners did to me!”

CHAPTER XXIV

TIGE! Tige! I've a voice. They didn't hurt me, Tiger; they just applauded and—did you hear them shouting my name, Tige?"

Hazel had burst through her dressing-room door with a call to her dog, and the dog had leaped at her as though he wanted to touch with his rough red tongue the throat that had acquitted itself so creditably before the executioners. He barked joyfully and licked his big master's hand unrebuked. Whatever he understood there could be no doubt that Tige had felt keenly the tension which had held his master and his little mistress all that long day and evening and that now he felt as keenly the reaction.

Allen patted his head with a hand that he could not steady. M. Dupont, too, to hide his emotion, bent over the dog.

"Tige, I don't deserve a bit of credit. Our two dear friends here have given me something that I am sure I didn't have in the beginning—a voice, Tige."

Lifting her face from the dog's head, the girl reached out her hands to the two men.

"What I am,—what I ever shall be of good or of greatness, I owe already to you." M. Dupont dabbed a linen handkerchief to his faded old eyes, and Allen Hamilton drew his hand gently away and went with unnecessary haste to answer a rap on the door.

In a moment the room was filled. Crowded. It seemed to the girl in the creamy lace gown that everybody she had ever met was there in her dressing-room laughing and crying over her, kissing and patting her and saying extravagant and incoherent things to her. Mrs. Burns had "always suspected it." Winifred Blaine

thought it "was perfectly wonderful." The Mummy had recalled, with each of her songs, "that never-to-be-forgotten day when she had saved his *dear* wife." Brice Mathews did not "recall" or "think" anything aloud, but his eyes said volumes and his hands were cold when they touched hers. The Duc de Gourman kissed her hair in a courtly fashion across Eleanor's shoulder, while Eleanor herself said a million unintelligible things in her ear. Eve Norton had always "just known it was in her, hadn't she, Billy?" Billy thought "she had," and ventured to say further that he "didn't care a damn (if the ladies would pardon his French) whether she was to be the public's idol or not, she had always been his little friend and he knew she always *would* be, and her friendship was worth a great deal more than her voice." Carryl Langley, whose arm was locked through Norton's, considered it "a shame that any one woman should be endowed with so many talents as well as so many virtues and beauty perfections." A great many others "thought" and "knew" a great many things, but through all the babble of voices there came to the girl a far-off chant of "Allah! Allah! Allah!" and through the maze of swarming faces and figures she saw a man on his knees in the desert sands.

The crowd thinned—was gone. With mad enthusiasm they had carried off with them the little French music master. She was alone with the man who had made this night possible for her, the man who had sown the seeds for it. She glanced about the flower-bowered room and sighed. At once she was ashamed of the thought that had given birth to that sigh. She had succeeded. Success meant living her life apart from the man whose legacy she was. Failure—would have meant—she was ashamed of the thought. She would be glad. She *was* glad. Her life, all her future, belonged to that man there by the window. She wanted of a sudden to tell him so.

"Allen."

The man by the window turned quickly.

"I—I wish you to know—that—that to-night I dedicate my life to you. That I want to give you a harvest for your sowing—to prove myself worthy of your faith in me. My one great desire is to *do* and *be* what you would have me do and be."

Allen Hamilton came slowly toward her, his hands clasped tightly behind him, as though he had need to keep them well under control, his eyes bright and shining with a wonderful new light, and his face a little pale, except where a tiny excited spot of red flashed and faded and flashed again in the center of either cheek.

He came quite near, stopped at less than arm's length from her and gazed at her for a long moment in silence.

He did not touch her, though he ached to do so. His arms were held tensely to his sides, his hands still clasped tightly behind him. It was something new for this man to find self-control in the least difficult. When he spoke at last there was a wistful appeal in his voice that would have made it unrecognizable to any one who knew him.

"Whatever I have been able to do for you has been nothing in comparison with that which you have done for me. I have merely cultivated a voice; you have cultivated a soul. I gave you work to do. You gave me rest from my work. You rejuvenated me—made me young again! You have done for me what all the physicians and scientists in the world could not have done, and yet"—he paused, ashamed of what he believed to be a colossal selfishness, but the yearning in his heart was stronger than his shame, and he went on hurriedly as if afraid that shame might yet be the victor. "In spite of all that you have done for me, I have something more to ask of you, Jean—something so great that I tremble when I think of its value. A gift so priceless that I am wondering what manner of man am I that I can even dare hope for it." His voice was husky with emotion now, and the avalanche of his love for her was carrying him on with its terrific momentum, when he noticed sud-

denly the little circles which the strain of the last twenty-four hours was bringing to the surface under the dark, velvety eyes that were looking up at him. Instantly he was contrite. Self and all for which self wished were thrust without ceremony into the background.

She was tired. It had been a hard day and a trying evening! She needed rest, and he was a beast to excite her further now. A brute whose only thought had been the gratifying of his heart's desires. So long he had waited, did another paltry twelve hours matter? Would he know his fate now at the expense of her rest?

Abruptly he turned and picked up her wrap.

"You are tired! To-morrow—to-morrow I shall lay before you my prayer for this great gift; and you shall grant or refuse it then, but to-night—to-night you must think of nothing but quiet and rest."

Without a word the girl slid obediently into the wrap which he held ready for her. Whatever this thing was which she could do for him, she knew that she would not hesitate to do it, and she knew, too, that he knew she would do it, willingly, gladly. There was no need to talk of it. Words and promises are but empty things, but to-morrow, when he had told her what this thing was which he wished her to do, how gladly, ah, how gladly would she do it!

She had heard often about the flattering offers that came to newly famous artists, and it was easy for her to believe that this man who had helped her up the ladder wanted some assurance that her voice would belong to him in all the years that were to come. Well, was that not the very thing she had expected? This giving of her life in a career that should reflect credit on him? She owed much to this man whose slow, fumbling fingers were fastening the clasps of her wrap, and she would pay. She would pay! Off there in the desert was a man who loved her and whom she——

But with quick determination she thrust the thought

of that other man from her, and made an effort to see sunshine and blue skies in the void ahead of her.

In silence they rode home together. Allen Hamilton busy with joyous rose-colored dreams of the future, which he intermittently assured himself could never really come to pass. Hazel, numb and confused, reviewing the *mêlée* between destiny and the might-have-been that was going on in her soul, leaving in its wake nothing but *débris*. But beside her sat the man who had befriended her, the man whose bread she had eaten, and the thought of retreat never occurred to her.

Involuntarily the girl closed her eyes. At once the face of another man rose before her. It bent above her where she sat on a worn wooden bench in a little park. The moon threw at her feet a long shadow of a high marble fountain which bore her name,—a breath of night air lifted the hair from the man's brow. His eyes were clear and compelling. He kissed her. She was in Heaven, everything else was chaos! She was a woman! For one brief moment snatched from the jaws of eternity, she was a woman! Then—then she had rejected Heaven and—gone—away, leaving the man there in the park alone. She had gone away because this man, who was beside her now, needed her; because she wanted passionately that he should reap; because she had been strong enough and brave enough to do the one thing that had seemed RIGHT to her. Was—she less—strong—less brave—now?

She knew that this man who had given her a place in his home had given her also a place in his heart—that she shared with Eleanor his love. That his love for her was of a different kind or quality than that which he felt for his sister she never dreamed. He had befriended her, and all the remaining years of her life would not give her enough time in which to repay him.

Suddenly Allen Hamilton caught her to him with a quick, unrestrained gesture. But even that was to her but the outburst of a benefactor's enthusiasm. The

thing her handsome *débonnaire* father would have done had he been here with her on this most wonderful of nights.

She made no effort to free herself, although the vise of his arms hurt her. She felt his breath fan the little stray curl which had always insisted upon screening one of her ears.

There came the touch of his lips on her brow—on her cheek—then with a little smothered cry she turned her face away and pressed it against his breast. He would kiss her lips. But not just yet! Please God! Not just yet! Her lips had been consecrated that night there in the little park across the seas. Not just yet could she nullify that consecration by giving them to some one else, even though that some one else had been the wonderful father whom she had worshipped in her earliest childhood. Some day she would give her lips to her dear Big Chief as freely as did Eleanor herself, but not just yet! Please God, to-night, when the cry of "Allah! Allah! Allah!" still rang in her ears, let her keep her lips as he, that other man across the seas, had left them.

After a convulsive moment, during which the girl shivered and the man's heart pounded, Allen Hamilton's arms relaxed their hold and then fell from her.

"I am sorry I did that," he said gravely. "I tried to keep a close vigil over my arms to-night, but somehow they escaped me."

Hazel looked up at him, and her face was illumined by the light from a tiny electric bulb that shone in the top of the car.

"From their strength and power I imagine they *are* rather hard to manage," and she smiled whimsically.

Allen's arms came near repeating their offence at that moment, so temptingly sweet was the girl beside him, but he reached down and patted Tiger the Third, who lay sprawled out at their feet, and the offending members were once more under control.

Gently, with a new-born tenderness, Allen lifted her

from the car when it had come to a stop, and guided her uncertain feet up the stone steps of his home. With a strange new mellowness in his voice, he asked if she were very tired. She smiled a dazzling smile at him that was in itself a reassurance, and the light in his eyes more than repaid her.

She was glancing at the little pile of messages and notes of congratulation on her success which had already arrived and which lay on a silver tray near the stairs, when the butler approached, apparently from nowhere, as butlers have a habit of doing, and whispered something in Allen's ear.

"Will you excuse me, dear little wonder-girl? There is a gentleman, it seems, waiting to see you in the drawing-room. One of those energetic reporters, I suppose. They were a bit chagrined at not being permitted to interview you to-night at the theater. I told them then that I would answer any questions they might wish to ask,—that I was your guardian and therefore knew your life as you yourself knew it. I knew that you were too tired and too tense to be bombarded with questions to-night. You run along to bed now, and I'll very soon make this man understand that you are not to be annoyed. He knows, if he heard you sing to-night, that you are New York's latest, greatest gift to the public, that already you are on the topmost rung of the ladder of success and whether you are a believer in suffrage or not, whether you favor the Darwin theory, or whether or not you like cream in your tea, does not in the least matter so far as the public or his paper are concerned."

Allen put a finger under her chin and lifted her face so that the light from the heavy chandelier above them would fall full upon it.

There was mutiny in the lovely eyes, and the red lips were pouting. She looked very much like a spoiled child at that moment. Allen was sorely tempted to take the girl in his arms and smother her with all the kisses and

caresses which had accumulated in those past empty years.

"You are pouting. It can't be that you care to see him yourself! You'll have to see enough of them, many of them and often, after to-night. You don't really care to be interviewed by this man?"

"Care? Why, I'm mad about it. I think if he hadn't come I'd have telephoned to some paper and asked them to please interview me over the 'phone. Darwin! Suffrage! Cream in my tea! Pooh! I'll tell him that I'm an anarchist; that I couldn't believe in Darwin's theory, seeing that I have a mother and father in Heaven and a Bible in my room. I'll tell him that I'm glad to get back to America, although I will miss the Slavinskys, the Giovannis and all the rest of my friends who run fruit shops, bakeries and delicatessens in Paris; that my hair is all my own and that it really and truly grows on my scalp; that I don't know anything about the Seven Notherland Sisters and that—that," she paused and, reaching up a white hand on which gleamed the jeweled ring which had been a Christmas gift from him, she pulled a lock of his hair playfully—"I want to tell him," she continued, "that to you and to M. Dupont must be given the credit for anything unusual in my voice. I want to tell him about the two who have boosted me up the ladder. You, my dear, might forget to tell him about Allen Hamilton."

The man flushed and shook his head.

"No one has made your voice great but the Creator and yourself. M. Dupont has told me how indefatigably you have worked. Seeing this reporter to-night only proves what M. Dupont has said, that you never seem to rest; that you are a dynamo that ignores wear and tear. Very well, my first, last and always ruler, you may be interviewed to-night, but after this I will see to it that you are not annoyed by newspaper men."

Hazel laughed.

"Oh, you big man, who paradoxically knows the world

and doesn't. You, who have had a thousand stage stars on your pay roll, don't you know that all the fun doesn't come from being great or famous? The most of it comes from having newspaper attachés hanging at your heels. After all, it is not their talents which make the fame for people, it is the press, the men at their heels, Having one's every opinion, even one's every word and gesture recorded in a narrow column on a big sheet of paper, may not seem vitally important to the world in general, but to those who desire it and can't get it legitimately, who never see their names in print except as the result of ingenuity or the emptying of their purses, to them it is wonderful. The public says that it is not especially interested in reading a descriptive article on how Miss Blank of the Cosmopolitan sneezed three times in her own musical, inimitable way on last Thursday at exactly four-twenty-one in the afternoon. But think how interesting such an article is to Miss Blank of the Cosmopolitan! The public says that it does not care a rap about learning, through the columns of its newspapers, just precisely at what hour Gaby, the came-near-to-being-a-queen lady arises from her downy couch in the morning or afternoon or at whatever time she *does* arise, but how that lady and her press agent must gloat over it! The working public may not like to read, over its dry bread and black coffee, about the number of bottles of champagne and the number of partridges consumed at the dinner given last Tuesday night at Sherry's by Mrs. Society Leader, who can trace her ancestors clear back to her grandfather, but Mrs. S. L. has her secretary clip out the article and carefully paste it in her 'What-she-dids' and 'How-she-did-its.' Maybe the tired factory or shop girl when she has finished mending her one decent three-ninety-eight dress does not care to read about the gorgeous creations of silk and lace worn at the Charity Ball. But the owners of the creations buy those papers to read nothing else but that." The girl ceased speaking for an instant, and her companion mar-

veled at the smoldering anarchism that seemed ready to leap into flames in her eyes.

"The public lies. It *does* love to read about what the world is doing, even to the sneeze of Miss Blank. Especially does the poorer world, which mends its clothes and eats dry bread, love to read about the lace and champagne. The public buys its papers, not to read solely about a war in Turkey or the price of oil, but to read about a harem in Turkey or about the kind of breakfast food the head of the Oil Company eats. The newspapers are to the general public what the fairy stories are to children. The poorer the child the more passionately it loves to read about the princesses, princes and castles. Dear Big Man, can it be that you have allowed your high-salaried stars to deceive you into believing that to be interviewed is to be annoyed? Can it be that you who know so much about their talents and their temperaments know nothing about their vanities? Why, my dear, big, credulous man, I suppose you are sorry that it is a part of your business to inflict an ingenious press agent upon your poor, notoriety-shrinking stars. And sometimes you shudder, I imagine, at the blatant things which your clever press agent has been able to get into the papers. But it is a part of your business,—so it goes."

Allen Hamilton smiled guiltily.

"No. You are giving me credit for an innocence and virtue that I do not really possess. Almost the first words which made sense in my brain as an infant were the words 'press agent.' I grew up with the value of the press growing with my years. To-day I appreciate fully that talent would be hidden under a bushel without that medium. Many times I have planned coups myself which have *made* a star and filled my houses to 'standing room only.' I must make you understand that I am not the curly-haired, apple-cheeked little kindergarten boy that you seem to believe me to be. I'm a hardened man, and I use a hardened man's weapons when I find them

necessary. I know perfectly well that stars who are not 'at home' even to their nearest relatives are always at home to the press. Seeing reporters, being interviewed, is the one thing greater than their salaries."

Hazel shook a menacing finger at the man smiling down at her.

"You knew that, yet you intended cheating me out of that pleasure?"

"I didn't think it would be a pleasure to you. Besides, I—I am so proud of you I wanted to have that pleasure myself. I was selfish, but I truly thought I might be saving you an annoyance."

"You are giving me credit for an innocence and virtue," mimicked the girl, "that I do not really possess. Vanity, vanity! I grew up with it. It grew and grew with my years. I am just aching to be interviewed and outinterviewed; to be written and read about. I must make you understand that I am not the curly-haired, apple-cheeked little kindergarten girl that you seem to believe me to be." She drew her brows together in mock seriousness. "I am a vain woman and I use a vain woman's weapons when I find them necessary."

Allen threw back his head and laughed with keenest enjoyment. Was there ever anybody like her?

He leaned forward and patted her flushed cheek.

"If *that* is the kind of person you are, you young minx, begone! Your Jack-the-truth-killer awaits you in the drawing-room."

In a flash she had left him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE man whose back was toward the door turned about as Hazel closed the door behind her. There had been something strangely familiar in the slant of the narrow shoulders. Something about the poise of the head that brought back to her scenes in Paris salons. As she had opened the door a premonition of evil laid its icy hand on her heart—a feeling of impending trouble came upon her. She had smiled to herself at what she mentally called her “set of newly acquired nerves.” Then the man wheeled and faced her.

François Louveau!

Her heart seemed to stop. She had never liked him, yet she had never been able to pin her dislike to any plausible reason. She had always distrusted him; had felt a sinister shadow envelop her whenever he happened to be near.

What could he want? Why was he here at this hour of night? She had not heard that he was in America. Had anybody else heard it? What could he possibly want with her? Surely he must know, must have felt her dislike for him!

He crossed the room with outstretched hands. There was a leer on his face which, she knew, was his nearest approach to a smile.

“Ah, you are here at last! I had the pleasure of hearing you sing to-night. You are wonderful! Wonderful!”

Hazel put her hands behind her. She was not good at pretending a welcome which she did not feel.

“Did you come here at this unusual hour to pay me compliments, monsieur?”

François Louveau arched his scant eyebrows.

"You have the same charming way that you have always had, that of going straight to the point of things. I like it. It's *tres interessant* in this age."

Hazel put out one hand and laid it on the burnished knob of the door.

"If you like it," she inquired coldly, "why don't you follow my example?"

The man bowed low before her with a graceful gesture which, interpreted, meant "as you will."

"Will mademoiselle be seated? It is rather a long story, and no doubt she is already tired."

He pushed a chair toward her.

"Thank you, I shall remain standing. Since you are so solicitous about my comfort, why did you not wait until morning with your—er—long story? Also,—why do you presume to think that any story of yours could possibly interest me?"

"I am sorry you will not be seated. If you remain standing you will understand shortly just *how* solicitous I was. As to waiting until morning, I never wait for anything, mademoiselle, once I've made up my mind to do or to have it."

"That is easy to believe, monsieur. You look as if you had not waited for many things in your life."

"May I have the pleasure of knowing what you mean, mademoiselle?"

The girl shrugged her bare shoulders, from which Allen had removed her wrap.

"Certainly, if you think it will give you any pleasure. I meant that you went pretty fast; that your gait showed in the lines of your face."

"Thanks," drawled the man. "Your candor is indeed refreshing."

There followed a silence. An uneasiness came to the girl. She wondered if she should call Allen. Then she threw back her proud little head with a Joan of Arc air and shook off the uneasiness.

The man was a fool, a conceited ass. He had dared

to come here at this midnight hour, and she would like to have the enjoyment of showing him just how little any story of his could interest her.

"The—er—story, which was of such importance as to bring you here between two days—I wish you would proceed with it at once. I'm consumed with eagerness and curiosity." There was mild sarcasm in her tone, and impudently and with intentional impertinence she patted back a yawn with one slender hand.

The man's bold, admiring eyes wandered over the slim figure, silhouetted against the high mahogany door, with insulting appraisal.

"You—you are really beautiful to be so ill-bred."

The girl's eyes flashed ominously, and she turned the handle of the door warningly.

"The—er—story concerns your friend Eleanor Rollins."

Hazel's hands went cold. Some way, by some uncanny instinct, she had known that it would concern Eleanor. She neither spoke nor moved. She looked straight back into the man's eyes with compelling directness.

"Eleanor Rollins refuses to see me. She returns, unopened, my letters to her. She owes me a great deal of money, and she has stopped making her payments. She thinks she can ignore me, that I will be passive, and that I wouldn't really hurt her, that I'm, what you call here in the States, bluffing."

Twice Hazel's lips moved before her voice responded to their command.

"For—for what, do you *claim*," she flaunted her frank disbelief at him, "she owes you?"

The man glanced cautiously at the door and then at the windows behind him.

"For silence," he replied with assumed coolness.

Little tongues of flame shot up in the girl's dark eyes.

"Silence about what?" she inquired in low tones that were dripping with sweetness. But the man felt the

venom under the sweetness, and for a brief instant he doubted the wisdom in having come to her. Then his knowledge of the girl's caliber reassured him.

"Silence, my dear young lady, about certain indiscretions, I might say a crime, since her petty sins led to a crime, a *big* crime."

Hazel swayed, yet her eyes still snapped unbelieving fire at him. With a vicious jerk she opened the door.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, mademoiselle. Think what it might mean to her if you compelled me in self-defense to tell my story. Think what it might mean to her brother."

Her heart contracted. Whatever this infamous liar, this scavenger of filth, this defiler of women's reputations, had to say, she alone must hear it. Whatever there lay within her power to do, to save Allen Hamilton pain, that must she do.

Slowly, softly, she closed the door. Then with an unmistakable loathing, she indicated with an expressive, characteristic gesture that she wished him to move farther from her. When he had smilingly put a greater distance between them she said curtly:

"I do not believe a word you have said, neither will I believe a word you are going to say, but I *do* believe that you are a blackmailer and that you have extorted vast sums of money from her. How you have managed to frighten an innocent woman into paying blackmail, I do not know, but that you have I am quite able to believe."

"You are wrong about the innocence of the lady in question, but you are right in your belief that she has paid her obligations promptly until a few months ago. You could scarcely be wrong in that belief since it was you, yourself, who furnished the, as you say over here, 'where-with-all' to make several of the payments."

For an electrical second Hazel looked at the man in dumb amazement; then, with a rush, little scraps of memory began fitting themselves together like the broken parts of a motion-picture puzzle. Disjointed, ill-shapen

pieces flew to each other with magnetic swiftness. Round and round went an irregular scrap until it found the niche into which it exactly fitted, then it settled into place and another scrap flew into the picture and began the same proceedings. At last the puzzle was whole, was complete. It was a perfect square, there was not a piece missing.

Then it hadn't been cards at all! Eleanor had made gambling at cards her excuse. Her losses had been the demands of this fiend who stood now with such cocksureness before her. And she—Eleanor's friend and protégée—had helped her to pay. Involuntarily she shuddered.

The man coughed softly.

"I am beginning to understand many things." She looked at him steadily. "One of which is that the last payment, as you are pleased to call it, has been made." Her words were very brave, yet even as she spoke she knew that more, much more, would be paid into his merciless hands.

"You are a very clever woman, Miss Willis,—too clever to believe that which you have just said. The amount due at this time is not so much, and silence at this time should be worth a great deal to Eleanor Rollins." He leered across the table at the shivering girl.

Hazel started. Ah, what an auspicious time for him! Two weeks before Eleanor's marriage to the Duc de Gourman! It was diabolical! Awful!

The man broke the silence abruptly.

"You are a very clever woman and a very great one, Miss Willis. No woman less great would have made the sacrifices for another which you have made for Eleanor Rollins." The girl lifted her hand in quick protestation, but the man went on heedlessly.

"She is absolutely selfish. She is so entirely without shame for that selfishness that she even told me that it was you who paid her I. O. U.'s, as she chose to call her obligations to me. I don't know how you managed

to do it, knowing nothing of your financial resources, but I have always felt that being the sturdy oak for a weak thing like Eleanor Rollins was not an enviable job, don't you know. Really your beauty of character combined with that of your face has jolly well balled me over, as the English would say. I've almost decided to make you Madame Louveau; it is the great temptation. *Qu'en pensez-vous?*"

Again his eyes leered out from under their puffy lids and wandered appraisingly over the slim, straight body of the girl.

"You are making a dire mistake by not being brief." Hazel's voice was dangerously vibrant.

"Ah! You frighten me!" He mocked, making an effeminate gesture with one cigarette-stained hand. "But I, too, wish to have the affair settled with as much dispatch as possible. If you are reasonable and can honor the obligation which Mrs. Rollins foolishly and suddenly has chosen to ignore, then, my dear, I shall be on my way back to France to-morrow, and with the—er—payment you have only to wish me '*bon voyage*.'"

"And if I refuse?" The girl's breath came quickly.

"Then"—François Louveau came a step nearer and his sinister face darkened—"I shall tell the Duc de Gourman and her brother that"—Hazel shrank closer to the door—"the late Mr. Rollins who fell into a ravine in the mountains of Switzerland and was instantly killed did not fall accidentally." He paused and watched for a second the effect of his words, then he dealt his final blow.

"Eleanor Rollins pushed her husband over the precipice, and I was the only witness."

There was a roar from the door at Hazel's back like the thunder that had, that night, come up to the curtained stage to her, and then, with the girl's instant discovery that the door had been ajar, that the catch had not caught when she had closed it a few moments before, there came a crash as of a heavy weight hurled

against it from the corridor, and with its sudden swing inward she was thrown violently to one side.

Allen Hamilton came into the room with a rush, and made straight for the astonished man who stood a few feet away. His big head was lowered, his hands, strong and sinewy, were doubled into powerful, menacing fists. His face was livid. There was a bloodcurdling bellow coming up from his throat.

Hazel stood petrified. It was but a dozen feet from the door to François Louveau, and Allen Hamilton was fairly leaping across that space. Yet Hazel thought a thousand thoughts in the second consumed by her benefactor's progress from door to target. Her fascinated eyes took in every detail of the picture. To her excited fancy, Allen Hamilton, with his lowered head and his mad bellow, was the steer her stepfather had owned and which a neighbor had shot because of its bellowing. The man, who stood as if paralyzed before the onslaught of the lowered head, was that neighbor who had always been a coward, and for whom the steer had a monumental feeling of dislike. *She* was only the fence post that had looked on with horrified eyes and near which they had later found the dead steer.

There was a crash, the splintering of furniture, a pause in the bellowing and then a groan. The man had gone down and the steer bent its powerful body above it.

With suddenly awakened brain and consciousness, Hazel ran back to the door which the master of the house, with mechanical precaution, had slammed shut behind him.

"Leave the room, but be silent, do you hear?"

Allen's glowing eyes glared at her from under the shaggy, disheveled locks of hair which fell down across his brow. With instinctive obedience Hazel opened the door and went out, carrying with her a picture of the body of a degenerated, dissipated manhood lying prone on the floor and a gladiator with accumulated forces of

conserved strength towering above it. Outside the door she pressed tight against the wall—and waited—waited in silent awe for—she knew not what. She dared not think. She could not think. In her brain there was chaos. A muffled groan reached her. She shrank tighter to the wall—her arms outstretched against it, her hands opened and pressed flat—the slender fingers spread apart, and the rich colors of tapestry showing in the V's between them. For more than an hour she stood there waiting—every nerve in her body taut. Silent by pure power of will when she wanted to shriek and staring straight ahead of her at a Buddha which grinned back at her from a niche in the wall opposite. The events of the night whirled past her in rapid succession. They jumbled, broke up, ran together again. But no matter what they did, there remained the same confusion. Always there was confusion! Just what was happening on the other side of that closed door she dared not think. Her Big Chief had told her to wait silently within call, and if she thought—she would surely scream. Once the butler had come to the door, had rapped, had received no answer from the room beyond and had gone quietly away again. He had not seen her, she had shrunk back into the shelter of a friendly shadow. Once the little Swiss clock which Eleanor had brought back with her from Europe broke the silence with its silly cuckoo. Another time an unseen hand turned the door knob at her elbow, but the door did not open. Then the butler had come again in answer to a ring, and there was a whispered command that came through the narrow crack of the partly opened door. Softly but hurriedly he went away. Presently he returned with an inkwell, pen and paper. These he handed through a crack of the door, and silently he went away once more. Hazel's fascinated eyes wandered from Buddha to door and from door to Buddha.

There was only an occasional dull murmur that reached her now. The muffled bellowing had ceased.

Evidently the affair was being settled quietly and without tragedy, but the girl silhouetted against the tapes-tried wall opposite the grinning Buddha still saw the picture she had carried with her from the room. On the floor the prostrate form of a degenerate. Towering above it, one knee on its chest, was—not a bellowing, disheveled man, but a great, handsome gladiator who had downed his combatant with a single blow.

A strange, primitive pride filled all her numb being. She was a cave woman, and those two men behind that closed door were men of the Stone Age. The law of might was right. They were æons and æons away from the brilliance of footlights and the girl who sang to a man in a far-off desert.

When the door had closed behind his protégée, leaving Allen Hamilton alone with François Louveau, whose throat was under his powerful fingers, he turned his blazing eyes once more to the livid face looking up at him from the floor.

"You dog! You liar of liars! Confess your lies now before I kill you! You blackmailer of women!" he cried hoarsely, pressing his knee with less mercy against the other man's breast.

"I'll—I'll confess—if—you—if you——"

The voice choked and was still.

"If I give you a chance? Very well, we'll see." Allen Hamilton loosed his grip on the man's throat, and the man lifted himself to his elbow and looked with wildly frightened eyes into the face bending over him.

"I——"

"Yes, you——"

The man on the floor knew that his assailant was the brother of the woman upon whom he had just laid the guilt of a crime. He knew that nothing but Truth would give him a chance for his life. He knew by the mercilessness in the fiery eyes bent upon him that at one wrong word from him he would be on the other side of the Rubicon.

"I—I was with Mr. Rollins and his wife in the Alps. They—they were—arguing—playfully—about something"—François Louveau, the shadow of fear on his face that was of a greenish hue, swallowed painfully—"she—she reached out—her hand—and—and"—he moistened his dry lips nervously—"pushed him, Mr. Rollins, laughingly—away—from—her. She—didn't—know how—near—to—the—the—precipice—he was. There was a quick—cry—and—and"—the man moistened his lips again—"he was—gone!"

He ceased speaking and made as if to rise. The man who leaned above him roughly pushed him back.

"Go on. Then?"

"That—that—is—all."

"You lie. You have only begun. What did the fine gentleman do when left alone with a lady in distress?" bellowed Allen Hamilton.

The man on the floor shifted his eyes away from those looking mercilessly down at him.

"I—I told her—that—I—had—seen—her push—him—into the—ravine—but—that——" He hesitated, with some long, slumbering part of him, that part of him which had once been proud of a clean family name, stirring into shame the subjective mind that stood aloof from his fear. Then by a prod from a none too gentle foot he haltingly resumed.

"I—told her—that I—that I would keep her secret—for—for—a——"

"Yes?" prompted the other man.

"For a—certain consideration."

"Which consideration she has been paying ever since?"

"Yes."

"I see. She was grieved and frightened. Shocked. She allowed you to tell the tale when you had returned to the hotel. It was you who told the gaping throng how my sister's husband had lost his footing and fallen over the cliff. It was you who described it all graphically. You who went with the other men to recover his body.

It was you who burned her bridges behind Eleanor Rolins, wasn't it?"

"Yes." The man on the floor whispered his answer.

"Then when the die was cast, when it was too late to change the story,—too late for the truth, when she had at last realized what she had allowed you to do and wanted to tell the thing as it really happened—you—you, the chivalrous gentleman, began to collect your tariff, the one which you had levied on Silence. Is not that true?"

"Yes." Again the prostrate man whispered his answer.

With his eyes never leaving those of François Louveau, Allen Hamilton got to his feet and, crossing the room to the bell in the opposite wall, rang peremptorily for James.

CHAPTER XXVI

A LLEN HAMILTON folded the confession of extortion and blackmail which he had hastily drawn up, and which the much frightened François Louveau had signed with a shaking hand, and thoughtfully he placed it in his pocket.

He was once more the man of steel nerves, quiet and grave. The fury had gone, leaving with him only a feeling of nausea and disgust for this reptile that had come into his house.

M. Louveau still stood a few feet away, where he had been ordered to stand upon his release a half hour ago, his little, shifty eyes watching like those of a rat peering from its hole. His face was ashen with fear. His knees trembled violently. He longed to leap to the door, but he knew such an act would be useless, worse than useless, yet it seemed horrible to be compelled to stand silently by awaiting the verdict of this other man whose sentence of punishment could be anything he chose it to be! François Louveau shivered and his clammy fingers caressed his bruised throat with painful reminiscence.

The master of the house looked up at him finally.

"I have decided to let you go," he said slowly.

François Louveau started and his knees ceased trembling.

"You are not worth killing. I wouldn't soil my hands with your rotten soul. To-morrow you sail for your own country; and if ever you touch American soil again I—I may forget my desire to keep my hands clean. I will not send any one to see you off. I know your measure. You will go. Nothing on earth could tempt you to stay. Your very fear of retribution would kill you. Go!"

François Louveau needed no second bidding. His craven legs flew with him to the door. There he paused, and with an air of bravado he turned about and said:

"The only member of your family whom I really care about is Miss Willis. I'd make her the Madame Louveau, mon Dieu, but I would!—if she were not already in love with that young Atherton. I leave her my fond adieux."

Allen Hamilton sat perfectly still, looking back at the man with hard, steely eyes and an impassive countenance, but the veins at his temples began to throb and expand with a sudden rush of blood that threatened to burst them.

Slowly he got to his feet, his eyes never once leaving the face of the man at the door.

"Go!" he commanded, and the Frenchman's legs almost doubled under him at the awful menace in his voice.

The door opened and closed and François Louveau was gone!

Allen Hamilton did not move. He stood in the center of the room, tense and rigid as the bronze bust of Napoleon on a pedestal close by.

After a time there came a rap at the door. Still he did not move. The door opened softly, and the butler came into the room with noiseless feet.

"A cablegram, sir." He extended his silver tray, and his master took up the significant oblong of paper with mechanical fingers. And mechanically the master ripped the little envelope open as the click from the door told him that he was once more alone. Without a glance at the address, he read the three scant lines of the message enclosed. They said:

"Did Allah give you success? Your success means sacrifice of love, yet I asked Allah to help you.

"JIM."

Allen Hamilton's eyes fastened themselves to the last word, but they no longer saw it. What they were seeing was the slender girl whom he believed to be upstairs and safely in bed.

He had no need to look at the address. He knew for whom that message had been written. It was only another of that blundering new butler's mistakes.

Carefully, methodically, he folded the sheet and put it with slow precision into the envelope. He glanced curiously around the room, snapped his fingers and coughed consciously. Then with studiously firm steps he started for the door leading into the hall. Half way across the room he paused beside a massive table. He looked at it critically, turning his head this way and that. He reached out his hand to touch it—but it was at that second that the tumult within him became his master.

The steel nerves were shattered. The adamant will was broken. The heart was shrieking for its one supreme moment of mastery. His whole being seemed shriveled like a plant that has been exposed to intense heat.

With a groan of despair Allen Hamilton sank into the chair that stood near the table. It was just as if it had been waiting there always for this one moment when it was to save this great man an ignominious fall to the floor.

Throwing his arms out across the table, he bent forward and buried his face in them.

A hesitating, stumbling prayer for strength went up from his heart. It was not a prayer of words. It was nothing which could be translated. It was a prayer in a language that no one but the Great Infallible could understand.

The thing which that beast had said was true then! Jean, his little wonder-girl—his little golden-throated gypsy—loved some one else! And he had dared to dream that she could love him. Him! With all this gray in his hair! With all those starved, empty years stalking mockingly behind him! He must have been

mad! He had dreamed, like a fool, such extravagant dreams! He had filled them with all those wonders and joys which the gods had always denied him. In those dreams he had robbed their Horn of Plenty and stuffed his heart with its riches. Fragrant, green vistas had that night opened up to him. Had stretched invitingly out before him—and now—now—they were suddenly nothing but years—future years—barren and desolate as those bleak ones behind him!

There had never seemed room on the merry-go-round of life for him until she had come. She had written him once how every one occasionally let go their hold and fell off the merry-go-round, and all about what a difficult thing it was to get back on again. *He* would never have let go, once he had lifted himself to the place beside her. His arms would never have gotten tired. In them was the unwasted, unused strength of all those other years. But—the place beside his little Jean belonged to another. There was no room for him. It would have been too great a blessing, that place at her side! She was such a glorious creature! Such sweet, honest eyes! Such red, truth-speaking lips! Such a spirit of youth, everlasting youth and spotless cleanliness! Such a fertile mind! And such a voice, ah, such a voice! She was so far above everything which he was and everything which he knew and yet—that night—that very night—he had dared to try to climb up beside her!

"Jean! Jean! My little lost Jean!" He lifted his head and stretched out his arms toward the door.

Muffled and indistinctly came the call to the girl who still stood near the entrance to the room, numb and stiffened from the tenseness of her taut nerves.

She had stood there centuries, so it seemed to her, like a sentinel who has been forgotten by his officer.

When François Louveau had come through that door she had watched him from her sheltering shadow, unseen. He had hurried down the corridor to the door

leading onto the street, and unconsciously she had breathed a sigh of relief. Her dear big friend had not killed! Had not stooped to crime even when it would have been justifiable. Then of a sudden had come a horrible suspicion! A fear! What if François Louveau—— But at that very instant the butler had approached the closed door—had rapped. Had entered and had come out again. Then he was all right! Her Big Chief was not—was not—she shrank from finishing the terrifying thought. She shivered. Another century passed. The Buddha grinned across at her with sardonic mockery. Then—had come that faint call! So faint, when it had spent its volume in the thick wooden panels of the door that she could not distinguish the words, but it was a call—and from him—that was enough.

In a second she was beside him. The man looked up at her with surprised, wondering eyes. Slowly, uncertainly, he passed a hand across his brow. Was he, Allen Hamilton, the practical materialist, to become a victim of nerves and fancy? Involuntarily he squared his broad shoulders, rose determinedly, though a little unsteadily and, looking fixedly at the door beyond, took a step forward as if he would pass through the figure of the girl before him.

Hazel reached up her hands and touched him on the two shoulders that were so pathetically squared.

"You called, Allen? What is it, dear Big Chief? Is it something about Eleanor or—or François Louveau?"

The man paused and looked down at her.

Eleanor! Why, that was his sister, of course! And François Louveau was—— Who the devil *was* François Louveau anyway? Suddenly out of the haze which enveloped him came a tiny shaft of light—of memory. Then like a fuse that has burned its way to the explosive, it gave a little bewildering, annoying flicker. This was followed by a flash, which lighted up all the events of that night.

The haze lifted. Was gone. With a rush his usual clearness of thought had come back to him. But the tearing pain in his heart, that had made of the other pains mere scratches—had indeed made him unconscious of them—was none the less poignant now, because he again felt the scratches.

"I thought you had retired. You were a foolish child to remain up so late." He drew himself away, out of her reach. He could not endure, just now, the touch of those dear little fingers, the little fingers that could never belong to him.

"Retire, when you might need me here? How could I?" There was gentle reproach in the girl's clear voice.

For one brief instant Allen Hamilton's eyes wandered hungrily over each feature of the beloved face, and a tightness came to his throat that had rarely been there since his early childhood, and his great, powerful hands began trembling. Impatiently he swallowed and cleared his throat and thrust his hands into the depths of his pockets.

"I sent that half-breed Frenchman back to his country. He was glad to go, I think. I wish you would put Eleanor at her ease by explaining to her that she is free of that parasite. Somehow, I—I don't think I—that I could talk to her about the matter. Will you do it for me?"

"That and much more, very much more, would I do for you, Allen. To-morrow, or rather to-day, since it is so long past midnight, you are going to tell me of that something which I can do for you that will be really worth while."

The shadow deepened in the man's heart, but he smiled a forced, joyless smile.

"Yes, to-morrow I will tell you what this—this great thing is that you can do for me." There was a note of unutterable sadness in his voice, and all the maternal instinct of the girl was aroused. She looked back at him with swimming eyes.

"There isn't anything which I wouldn't do for you, Big Chief, if it were within my power to do it." She lifted one of his hands, which had escaped the confines of his pocket, and pressed it to her cheek, and the moisture in her dark eyes condensed, overflowed and fell down upon it. The touch of her tear on his hand sent a bitter pain through all his being. Almost roughly he pushed her from him, and when he spoke again his voice was hoarse and unnatural.

"You must have your rest, or I shall not ask of you this great thing. Run along to bed now and sleep until noon. Good-night—Little Songbird!"

Hazel started for the door reluctantly.

"Good-night, dear, dear Big Chief!"

On the threshold she paused, touched her tapering fingers with her lips, blew a kiss to him, and was gone.

Once more Allen Hamilton sank onto the chair, and throwing out his arms across the table, buried his drawn face in them.

Hazel found her way down the dimly-lighted halls to Eleanor's room. Nocturnal visits between these two were not at all unusual. Dawn frequently found them night-gowned and blanketed huddled up together on the side of a bed, or in a couple of soft, roomy chairs in one or the other's room. Most of those nocturnal visits were pleasant ones, but Hazel went to this one with reluctant feet. The thing she had promised to do was not an agreeable thing, yet by doing it herself she could save him, her dear benefactor, that unpleasant task, and since he believed his sister should know of her release from bondage, she would tell her, pleasant or unpleasant though the telling be.

In response to Eleanor's sleepy invitation, which followed her sharp rap, Hazel entered, switched on the lights, and going over to the bed looked down at the blinking woman about whose face was a confused mass

of golden hair. This woman, with the doll baby eyes and hair, was the cause of that note of sadness which she had heard in her Big Chief's voice. It was she who had brought him near to a tragedy. Her weakness that had almost caused blood to be shed!

For an instant the girl had a passionate, insane desire to strike with her hand the pretty face of the woman before her. Then reason fought its way back to her excited brain, and at once she was sorry and ashamed of the desire and of the thoughts which had given birth to it.

No! No! No! She was to be pitied, not blamed. Had she not been the victim of a fiend? She had really been guilty of nothing but fear—fear of the venomous tongue of that terrible man. She had suffered as—as much as people such as she *ever* suffered.

"What ever is the matter? Why, you look as if you'd seen a ghost, and—why—you've not been to bed, you're still dressed!"

Eleanor's blue eyes were opened wide now, and she raised herself on her elbow and stared at Hazel with wonder and astonishment.

"No. I—Allen——" The girl turned her eyes away from the curious blue ones. "Allen—has—been——"

"Been what? Allen has been—what? Tell me, what is it? Quick." Eleanor Rollins sat up with sudden apprehension. Something had happened to Allen. Allen, who had never been hurt—who had never been sick, in all her remembrance of him. She couldn't connect any sort of illness with the big brother who had always tried to be the buffer between herself and things which hurt. He had been such an invulnerable buffer and she had taken his protection for granted, and only now, when some one was trying to say that something ill had befallen him, now, when at last he was not invulnerable, when there came a chance that he—that he—— Oh, she realized now, quite well, what he had been to her in her gay, selfish life.

Quietly Hazel sat down beside the woman on the bed, and gently she stroked the tumbling yellow hair.

"Allen has been settling with François Louveau!" Eleanor shrank as from an icy blast. "He wished me to tell you that M. Louveau is leaving America by the first ship to sail, and that you are out of his clutches. Doesn't that make you very happy?"

But the woman on the bed burst into tears and it was some time before Hazel could quiet the uncontrolled weeping. There came a torrent of self-arraignment, a wild confession of a tardily revealed selfishness, an avalanche of self-reproach, to all of which the girl listened patiently and with profound pity, and if the thought occurred to her that the awakening was a trifle late, she thrust it from her with savage loyalty.

A little later, as she entered her own room, Tige sprang at her with a low whine, but for the first time his young mistress did not notice him, even when he rubbed a shaggy side against her filmy, silken skirts or pushed a cold nose under her inert hand. He only hung the closer to her. If his little mistress could not hear him when he whined so wistfully or see him when he begged so piteously, then it was because she was ill. And if she were ill he needed to stick all the closer to see that she was well cared for. Had not his big, grave master told him a thousand times that they, he and the master, must always guard the little mistress? Must always see to it that she came to no harm?

When the drowsy Thompson had tucked the soft, silken sheet and woolen blanket around the shoulders of the girl, she busied herself about the room, patting and scolding the dog alternately, hanging away garments, putting trees in the little, abandoned shoes, and arranging Tiger's sleeping porch.

Hazel lay very still, her two long black braids stretched out over the pillows, her eyes closed. Pulses throbbed at her wrists and temples. There was a tight, choking feeling at her throat and a suffocating sensation around

her heart. She was conscious of nothing but the confusion of events that marched before her without system or order, like an endless procession that had no leader.

First there were hundreds of faces, a whole sea of them above a checker board of black and white shoulders, and through them a camel and a low sun-bleached tent wandered aimlessly. Then there was a mad lot of electric bulbs which danced fiercely around her feet and a yellow mongrel dog that tried to hide under them. There was an orchestra sitting on a bower of flowers in a dressing-room and the man with the baton was shouting "Allah! Allah! Allah!"

A Frenchman from Switzerland tried to push her off the stage into the chasm which yawned below. But her Big Chief caught her just in time and pulled her back with a string of pearls. Everybody applauded him, except Eleanor, who wept bitterly. She wondered vaguely why Eleanor did not use a muffler. Then M. Dupont came to her and told her to begin her reaping, and she knew that it was time for His Harvest.

The grain waved and billowed like a golden sea around her. She stood knee-deep in it, her scythe glistening in the sunlight. It was a tremendous harvest! It would take a lifetime, all her lifetime, to reap it, to gather it in for the man, the kindly man who had sown it, but she could do it, would do it.

M. Dupont did not need to threaten to hurl a marble fountain at her if she refused to reap that endless sea of golden grain for her dear, Big Man. She would not refuse. It was a—a tremendous harvest, but she—she would reap it.

She felt terribly alone in that great billowing sea, but—she—must not hesitate. She must do it for *him*.

She lifted the long, gleaming scythe. As she looked at it a storm broke over the sea. It tossed about her in maddened waves, that tore at her ferociously. Something caught about her neck and was drawing her under. Then came the sound of Allen's voice calling to her.

"Jean, Jean, where are you?" He was trying to find her. All her fears left her. He would come and get her and take her away from all danger. He was so big and strong. But it was not he who came to her rescue. It was some one chanting "Allah! Allah! Allah!" who came riding across that harvest-field to her, on a great swaying camel.

Some one whose arms felt wonderfully strong and capable as they lifted her to a place beside him, close to the bow of his Ship of the Desert.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE next morning Allen Hamilton had a long talk with M. Dupont, and poor little M. Dupont was as clay in the potter's hands; a frightened witness subjected to the compelling force of an adroit cross-questioner. Before he knew that he was being questioned he had told Allen Hamilton many things which dug great gaping ravines in the aching heart of that man. So—she had loved—aye, and still loved, a man whose grief at the sacrifice she had made of herself and him had driven him far into the fastnesses of a desert! And that sacrifice! It had been made that he, Allen Hamilton, might reap!

What a woman! What a wonderful treasure the gods had snatched from him! It would have been too great a happiness to have had her! Too great a joy!

When the little master made his way blindly out of the library after that conference, there were little rivulets winding their separate ways down the furrows of his cheeks. He had asked no questions himself. He had needed to ask none. *Her* son was unhappy! Sorrowing! Even his dim old eyes could see that, and there was nothing else that mattered. Nothing else to know. The one big thing was—that *her* son was hurt!

Softly he closed the door behind him and made his way slowly, heavily, up the stairs.

It was soon after M. Dupont had left the master of the house that Hazel found him. He was standing before a portrait of his mother. It hung between two high bookcases and was the only picture in the room.

Several times since the arrival of M. Dupont Allen Hamilton had found the little French master standing

before this portrait, a look of infinite love and reverence on his withered old face, and some little incidents, long since forgotten, came back to him, and little by little they wove themselves into a fabric of shattered romance. When he was a very little boy some relations had thoughtlessly discussed before him his mother's early love. They had been of the one belief, that his mother's heart would always be "with that singer's son," and that she "never would be happy again."

That conversation had flown into a pigeon-hole of his memory and had remained there, secreted until M. Dupont had come.

When he had reached his majority and had come into possession of his share of his mother's and father's separate and joint estates, he had found that his mother had left to him her diary. It was sealed, as her will had directed that it should be. He had never broken that seal until in the early hours of the morning just past.

A letter that had come to him with the diary had said:

"MY DEARLY BELOVED SON: You are just a little fellow now, with curls and rosy cheeks, also, alas! busy little fingers that are very smudgy, as will this page already testify (poor little chap—who wants to know to whom I am writing—you don't understand, do you, when I tell you this is a letter to the big man that I hope you will one day be), but when you read this, if ever you do, you will be a big, big man, shorn of your curls and roses, and with fingers no longer smudgy, but strong and clean.

"I am writing this that it may be given to you in the event of my death occurring before your majority. The diary is to be read by you only at a time, should such a time ever come (which I pray God to forbid) when you will be called upon to make some great sacrifice.

"In your first hour of despair my diary will lend you strength, just as mother would do if she could be there.

She *shall* be there, dear, if not in person, at least in spirit, but she will not be able to make you know her nearness!"

In the dawn of this morning Allen Hamilton had broken the seal of his mother's diary and had read it. Read the story of sacrifice through blinding tears that came like unfamiliar strangers to the eyes from which the glint of steel had gone. Then with a feeling of awe he had closed the book that revealed a Chamber of Horrors in his mother's heart—that told of her daily battle between love and duty, and of the victories that were always the latter's—and sat, until his valet announced that his morning bath was ready for him, thinking of the girl upstairs who had sacrificed Love for Duty—ease for reaping—Jim Atherton for him.

He would not allow it, of course. He could not. He shuddered when he thought of the sacrifice his mother had made and of the one his little Jean would have made, but of the one which he was to make Allen Hamilton did not think.

"Bon jour, mon ami! James tells me you have been up some time, but that you have fasted until now, that you might breakfast with me. I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long, but you see, Thompson almost buried me with newspapers this morning and insisted that I read my way out, which I would have done without insistence from any one. Thompson seems to be laboring under the delusion that I am afflicted or endowed (whichever you please to call it) with a superabundance of modesty, and that said modesty would cause me to shrink from flamboyant publicity. Poor, deluded Thompson! I read every word about Hazel Willis in all those papers, and I read them aloud to Tige! But Tige, the jealous wretch! he only sniffed disdainfully, as though pleasing the public and being flattered by the press made one very common indeed! And when the boxes of flowers began arriving this morning he sat

in the center of the room, and with sullen, half-lidded eyes watched Thompson converting my room into a veritable garden. It was only when your valet brought in your single great red rose, and your little note which said that the rose carried with it your love for Jean Delaine and your compliments for Hazel Willis, that Tige threw off his air of fine indifference, and, sniffing at the rose and note, barked happily. Honestly, I believe Tige is jealous. He wants me for you and himself exclusively."

Hazel had crossed to the side of the room where hung the portrait between the two high bookcases and smiled radiantly up at the man who stood before it.

Allen Hamilton caught his breath and put his hands hastily behind him.

She was brilliantly sunny, this wonderful girl! And the radiance of her hurt his eyes—also it shot its rays through the cloth of his garments and the flesh of his breast and burned deep into his heart.

"Tige is wise," he said. "I favor his sentiments. I, too, dislike sharing you with the public. You are too delicate and fine for the limelight. It might hurt you. The sun is nice, you know, but too much exposure to it will thicken a thin skin and turn a white one brown. Sometimes too much sun is deadly. Tige is not so far wrong. I shall consult with him about your future the moment I have time."

Hazel's radiance refused to be clouded, her spirits to be dampened.

"Oh you silly, Big Chief! You, too, are jealous! But I am like that vaudeville actress who says 'I don't care.' There is only one thing that worries me, Allen. I am beginning to doubt if it was really Hazel Willis who sang last night. And if it was, then I want to know if Hazel Willis is I—and if she is," the girl paused for a second and her dark eyes, raised to his, twinkled. "I would like you to tell me if *I* am really *I*."

"*You* are *you* more than any one else is any one else!

You are distinctly original—you are like no one else in the world—you are——”

Allen Hamilton checked himself abruptly. He should have known better than discuss with her so dangerous a subject as herself. Already his pulses were throbbing, his arms aching, his head dizzy! He looked away from the smiling, upturned face and allowed his eyes to wander back again to the portrait of his mother. Without looking at the girl he continued speaking, but his voice was less warm and there was just a little harshness in it.

“I told you last night that to-day I would ask of you a great favor.” He hesitated, but the sweet eyes of the portrait looked calmly, encouragingly down into his and gave him strength to put temptation, with its dear, dark eyes and its sweet red lips from him with unwavering swiftness.

“I am here, Big Chief, to listen to that request. Surely you know there is nothing I would not do for you!” A note of reproach sounded through her words.

The man knew only that the dear, dark eyes were full of tender eagerness and he dared not look into them. He could refuse this girl’s sacrifice the more easily if he kept his own eyes fastened on the face of his martyred mother.

“I ask you, Jean, for a life-lease on your wonderful throat and its golden voice.”

He did not breathe during the brief interval in which he waited for her answer.

Once more the mirage of a great field surrounded the girl. Once more a golden sea waved and billowed all about her. She stood shoulder deep in it now. All the years of her life would be consumed in its harvesting, but she did not shrink from the task.

She reached out her hand and laid it with a reassuring pressure on Allen Hamilton’s arm.

“I mortgaged my voice to you one time, you remember, but I had no right to do even that. Already it belonged to you. I had no right to mortgage to you then, nor

have I any right to lease to you now, what always has been yours from the beginning."

Over the golden sea, with the whispering harvest breeze, came the faint, far-off call of "Allah! Allah! Allah!" but the girl stood straight and brave as a soldier should stand when, facing duty, he hears the bridges, that would lead back to love, safety and happiness, snapping and burning behind him.

Allen Hamilton drew his arm away from under the firm, reassuring fingers. He felt keenly the sacrifice this girl was making at that moment, and he marveled at the strength of her. Ashamed, suddenly, at his own weakness, he turned from the portrait on the wall and looked down into the face of the girl who would so willingly give her life to the reaping of a harvest for him.

"If it is true that your voice belongs to me, Jean, then it is my right to command you to do with it as I wish." For an instant his voice almost broke, then with an effort it became steady again.

"It is my wish," he went on, "that you never sing again before an audience that has paid to hear you. That you will never again sing as a professional, but merely for the entertainment of friends and those near and dear to you. That you live a life independent of music. That you live as other women live; love and marry and, perhaps," Allen Hamilton's habitually stern lips went tremulous, "some day fulfil God's greatest mission, that of becoming a mother. It is my wish that you sever at once all ties with career, and become merely my little foster-sister."

Hazel's face had gone colorless as a piece of newly-carved ivory, even the lips, that were parted in wonder and surprise, had lost their poppy red. Her eyes were wide and their pupils dilated. She leaned toward him like a slender reed in a storm. All her world had crumbled and fallen about her. The harvest field for which her scythe had been ready lay flat and dead.

Long afterward, when she lived this moment over again, alone in her room upstairs, she was glad to remember that no selfish joy had come into her heart with her sudden liberation from the fetters of duty. Glad that no feeling of great relief had rushed into her heart when the shackles of career had dropped from her, leaving her free. Free to "live as other women lived," free to "love and marry," and, dear God, free to hold, perhaps, in some future day, a wee little atom of humanity to her woman's breast.

She was glad, too, that vanity had ushered into her heart no inconsistent little regrets because she was never again to sing before a vast multitude of people who had paid to hear her; because she was never again to see her name emblazoning the pages of the newspapers of one of the greatest metropolises of the world. How proud she was to recall that in that moment there had been no thought of self, no thought of the man far off in an arid land, no thought of love and freedom, no regretting vanities. She had stood very bravely, very firmly, in the center of her benefactor's field that was ready to be harvested, and when its reaping had been unexpectedly denied her, she had been stricken with an emotion close akin to grief.

Now, as her slim young body swayed toward him she was conscious of nothing but the debt which she could never cancel, a debt, to this most generous of men, that she so passionately yearned to pay.

"But I want to sing for you!" she cried when speech came back to her throbbing throat.

"And so you shall. I am much like Tige, in that I don't want to share you with the public," Allen Hamilton answered, his arms sorely tempted by the swaying nearness of her body, the muscles of his face twitching and his vision strangely blurred.

"I will share you with Tige and the man you marry, but with the public—never!" He tried to speak with that metallic sternness which usually characterized his

voice, but he failed utterly. After the first three words there sounded an insistent tremolo that came strangely from lips so thin and straight, and the last words sank to a whisper and trailed off into a sigh.

"But what if—what if—I should never marry?" Hazel persisted.

"You *will* marry, dear. You will marry some day, because you will want to spend your days with the one man, because love will mean life to you, and, too, because—because I will wish it. I shall be growing old soon and I shall want to see you safely settled in the heart and home of some worthy man. Your happiness shall be my happiness, when I have outgrown my interest in the downtown world. Just now I am part and parcel of the seething masses, but there will come a day when I will tire of it all—a day when I shall long for peace—a day when I shall want a creed, and when that day comes you will have a home into which I can drag my drowsy body and my awakening soul. Ah, little Jean, I know that you will not fail me then."

"Fail you, mon cher ami! I would rather die! But you—it hurts me when you speak of a day when you will need a creed!" The girl could not endure that he should believe himself to be less worthy than she.

"What are creeds?" she went on, anxious to convince him of his own worthiness. "Goodness is all there is that really counts. And you, Big Chief, have had more of that, been more of it than I shall ever have or be."

The man smiled a wan, unconvinced smile.

"Let me touch your eyes and beautiful white throat," he whispered, with sudden irrelevance.

The girl leaned nearer to him and his big hands, so powerful, so little used to gentleness, wandered caressingly over her face. They touched her quivering eyelids, her cheeks, her little rounded chin and then lingered on her neck with infinite tenderness.

It was more than he could stand. Contact with the smooth, cool skin of her sent turbulent despatches up

his powerful arms and thence to his head and heart. It intoxicated him. It maddened him. With sudden gruffness he pushed her from him, and with a bellow from the very depths of his being he told her to "Go!"

She shrank a little at the bellow, but believing him to be laboring still under the nerve strain of the night before, she forgave it at once, and went hastily out of the room.

Beside her plate on the breakfast table she found the cablegram from Jim Atherton. Written across the envelope were the words: "This came last night. I opened it by mistake. ALLEN."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT night, at dinner, which was *en famille*, Allen Hamilton surprised his sister, Jean and M. Dupont, by a brief description of his newly developed plans for the winter.

In Los Angeles, California, he was building a theater. He wanted to see its architect. There was at present a strike in Los Angeles of building constructors, and his building for weeks past had been but a skeleton of steel shafts and girders.

Besides, Broadway was getting just a bit on his nerves and he needed a change. He had decided, therefore, in view of these things, to spend the winter season in California. His offices here could run quite well without him. If they did not know how to run themselves then it was high time they learned.

Allen Hamilton looked haggard and suddenly old under the glaring artificial light, as if age had stolen upon him with swift, noiseless feet, and in one single twenty-four hours had robbed him of all claims to youth and the joys of life. Had filched the brightness from his eyes and soul, leaving them equally dull and leaden.

There was no one at the table who, looking at him then, could say that Allen Hamilton did not need a change.

To Eleanor Rollins there came a volley of bitter self-reproaches. She believed herself to be responsible for that unwonted look of weariness in his eyes. He looked tired, he who had been indefatigable always. She denounced herself bitterly, in her conscience-stricken heart, but aloud she said nothing.

Through Hazel he had asked her to forget her bon-

dage to an extortionist and had commanded her never to speak of it. For the first time in her life Eleanor Rollins wished to ask forgiveness for some folly which she had committed, but she dared not ignore her brother's command.

The next morning, very early, before any members of the household, except his valet and chauffeur, were astir, his limousine carried Allen Hamilton to the Grand Central Station. He had left notes of farewell to those in the slumbering house.

He had taken care on the previous evening to not mention the hour for his departure. In the early afternoon of the day before, when he had come to his sudden decision, he had arranged for accommodations on the earliest possible train. Always he had had a horror of "good-byes." Eleanor never failed to weep when parting with any one near enough and dear enough to give an excuse for weeping, and he dreaded being wept over. Hazel, he knew, would not weep, but—he could not endure seeing her again until he had mastered the thing which at present so filled him with pain.

Dawn had brought with it a drizzling rain. The sky, that hung low over the house where slept the two beings love for whom filled every recess of Allen Hamilton's heart, was gray and leaden. There was a penetrating chill in the air which told of the winter that was only just around the corner from now, and the limbs of the naked trees that were in front of the house, shivered and tried to shake off the cold, clinging drops of rain.

As Allen followed his valet down the broad, wet stone steps leading from the doors of his home a grim smile came into his face.

At the side of the limousine he paused and looked back.

He was leaving behind him all that was dearest in life to him. Yet a temporary absence was essential—was compellingly necessary. He needed time in which to regain his poise—his usual equanimity. He needed to be

a brother to both the women whom he was leaving there in that house, and just now he was a brother to but one of them.

He knew perfectly what sort of a fight lay ahead of him, but he knew also that his adamant will (once he had pieced it together) would be sufficient ammunition to vanquish this insidious thing that had crept upon him. His heart was insubordinate now—insurgent. But there would come a day when he would conquer this unprecedented insurrection—a day when he would once again be master of himself.

The autumn rain beat against his resolute, upturned face, but his eyes were dry and hot. The tentacles of his heart were reaching out toward the house and what it contained, but no one, to look at the man as he stood there beneath the naked, shivering trees, with the rain beating upon him, would have thought for a second of those reaching tentacles. There was will indomitable in the grave face, and instinctively one would know that those tentacles were as frailest threads against the power of that will.

His waiting valet touched him on the arm and reminded him apologetically that he had but barely time to catch his train. With a sigh Allen Hamilton climbed into his car.

As it whirled him down the wet streets he looked gloomily and with a little bitterness through the glass which was blurred by the trickling raindrops, and thought what a fitting day it was for his departure from home—and from her.

His sun had set. It was but to be expected that the sky would be overcast and leaden.

The notes which he left were brief. To his sister there was but a line to the effect that seeing that the Duc de Gourman was a better complement than he for the coming social season she should be really glad to be so well rid of him.

To Jean there was a carefully worded line of tenderest

wishes for her first New York social season, and a regret that he could not be there to watch her scintillate.

And to M. Dupont a brief sentence of understanding and an explanation of the diary which he was leaving for him, because he felt, he said, that his mother would have liked him to do so. The diary would be delivered by James, with whom he was entrusting it.

The master of the house was well on his way at the hour when Dr. Pelham, the family physician, was hastily summoned. Hazel had awakened with a chill which had been immediately followed by an alarming fever. Eleanor's first thought had been to wire Allen. A message would reach him if sent in care of his train, but at the suggestion Hazel had shaken her head emphatically. Why should he be disturbed? If she were going to be sick, there would be nothing that he could do for her which Dr. Pelham could not have done, and there was much, so much, that he could do for himself out there in the West. Would not Eleanor promise that under no condition would she cut short Allen Hamilton's stay in California? And Eleanor had promised.

When Dr. Pelham left Hazel's room he found Eleanor Rollins and a grave-faced little Frenchman waiting in the corridor for him.

He told them it was quite evident to him that Hazel had been bordering on a nervous breakdown possibly for some little time, and that the excitement resulting from her *début* had snapped the slender thread which had controlled her vibrating nerves.

There followed weeks of illness for Hazel. Weeks during which Dr. Pelham haunted her room and shook his head dubiously. Weeks that taught new things to Eleanor in the way of unselfish love and self-sacrifice. Weeks of agonized suspense for M. Dupont.

Sometimes she was delirious, but not always. There were times when she lay quite still with white lids closed over tired, burning eyes, and reviewed the past, which stretched its eventful length across an ocean and back

again. She reviewed it in a detached sort of way, impartially and without prejudice. There were many things which arose above her mental horizon that brought with them pain, but there were also a few which gave peace to her soul.

Her benefactor had said that her happiness would be his harvest. That the reaping he wished her to do was guarding her voice from the paying public. These things she repeated over and over again, in a dreamy, wondering way. Surely it was little like the Harvest she had been prepared to reap. What a wonderful man he was! How much he had done for her! And she would feel with her hot little fingers the silken sheets covering her.

Eleanor had written her brother that Hazel was "not very well," and that she wished her, Eleanor, to tell him that she did not feel like writing until she was quite herself again.

The days of Hazel's delirium passed with fleetest wings, but those on which she was conscious dragged with painful slowness.

Then had come one at last, a day when she was better, when the crisis had come and gone, leaving new life in its wake. A day when Dr. Pelham smiled the smile of victory and Eleanor dared to leave the house for a brief walk in the open air. When the little white-haired master wept with joy and Tiger, permitted to visit the room, barked boisterously for a sign of recognition.

After that a sturdy vitality crept out from under cover and asserted itself boldly and with telling results. Scarlet was once more in the thin lips. A light flared up now and then in the dark eyes. The night robes were exchanged for soft, silken dressing gowns. The numerous bottles on the table at the foot of the bed dwindled in number. Vanished.

Midwinter found the occupant of the east chamber of the big gray stone house on the Drive quite her usual self again with the exception of a wistfulness in the dark eyes and the ethereal look of her slender hands.

Back in Paris a flock of hungry sparrows and pigeons gathered twitteringly around a closed window, high up near the roof, of a ramshackle old building on a smelly side-street and marveled noisily that the window, now always closed, no longer showered crumbs upon them. For days the hungry twitterings of those birds had haunted M. Dupont, until at last there came a time when he could no longer endure their reproaches. He went to the east chamber and sat long and silent, wondering timidly how he should tell her.

Suddenly Hazel reached out one of her hands and laid it affectionately on one of his.

"I understand, monsieur. They are calling you. They are calling me, too. Go, and some day I shall join you."

M. Dupont was not surprised that she should know what it was that had put unrest in his heart. She had always read him as she might read a page in an open book. They were *en rapport*, this young girl and himself. He had instilled in the growing mind and soul, which had come to him in this girl, much of himself. It was not to be wondered at then if, now when the birds found little to eat in the wet or frozen streets, she should hear them call—at the little studio window, just as he could hear them.

Thus it came about that M. Dupont left the city where had lived the girl whom he had loved in that long ago, left the country where a majestic mausoleum housed the dust of Her and awaited the clay of Her son, left the dark-eyed girl for whose sake he would die if need be and sailed away to his carved sandal-wood screens, to his gorgeous and his shabby rugs, to his old piano with its yellowed, mellowed keys—and to his hungry sparrows and pigeons.

Hazel missed him as much as had the birds outside that closed studio window in Paris. They had grown to depend upon the crumbs of bread which he had always and so generously given to them. She had learned to depend upon the crumbs of gentle philosophy which he

had always and so generously given to her. She wandered aimlessly about the house like a lonely wraith. She radiated peace and quiet, yet every one who saw her during those long winter months felt the utter loneliness of her. She talked and smiled with the intimate friends who came occasionally to the house and sent them away with a cleansed feeling, as though they had just come up from baptismal waters. Sometimes she rode down the boulevards and through the park with the Duc de Gourman and Eleanor. But most often she remained at home alone.

The room which was Allen's was her favorite part of the house. It was here that she and Tige sat innumerable hours and talked about the man whose presence still permeated the place. She would detail a hundred little things, such as minute descriptions of the way he had come upon herself and Tige the First, that memorable day in the park, or of the way he had looked that night in the theater when he had first heard her sing—or—of countless other things. And Tiger would make whining or barking comments.

She would move about the room, the dog at her heels, touching with reverent fingers the things he had touched and breathing a little prayer for his happiness. It was at his desk that she sat when she wrote him her sparkling letters, sparkling in spite of the darkness of the abyss out of which Dr. Pelham had just drawn her.

Whenever she passed the door of the drawing-room she shivered and looked involuntarily back at the high carved panels and then at the Buddha, which always grinned sardonically from the niche in the opposite wall.

Allen still gave her a comfortable allowance, but she did not draw upon it. She had no wish for anything.

Then one day in early spring she purchased a saddle horse, a spirited thoroughbred. She called him "Chief." Riding brought a faint touch of color to the delicate ivory of her cheeks and buoyant health to her body and mind.

Eleanor and the Duc de Gourman had postponed their wedding until autumn, and as Eleanor did not miss her greatly when she was away, the Duc de Gourman being with her most of her waking hours, she stayed many days and nights in the old house by the sea, the place where she was born and from which she had one day run away. In the fall, when she had first come out here with Allen Hamilton the neighbors had looked at her in amazement, and some of them, believing her to have arisen from the dead, had crossed themselves religiously at sight of her. Later, when she had asked for the keys, the man who had charge of the place had given them to her without question.

She had cabled for Burns and that personage came flying like a homing bird from Scotland to that old house where she had served so many years. A man had been employed to care for the grounds and soon the field behind the house which for years had been barren was waving tiny green corn blades in the dazzling spring sunlight.

Everywhere Hazel found evidences of her benefactor's thoughtfulness and love. Here were new bricks in the chimney where a storm had torn off some old ones. Here was a ~~new~~ picket in the fence where an old one had rotted and disintegrated. There in the old flower bed were some dried yellow stalks which had been last summer's flowers. The lone rose-bush had been propped up with a long stake and its decrepit old branches were tied to a column of the porch with a substantial cord. And down there on the bluff was the tree which his care had saved from an ignominious end in the sea.

The girl, unable to wait until many suns had warmed the air and water, donned a bathing suit and went for a swim in the sea that had been hers in that other epoch and was hers once again. Burns was sure she would "catch cold" and had a pot of some nauseating tea already brewed "against the cold she will have" when the girl ran shivering into the house. But the cold was like all

those expected colds in the past. She eluded it or it couldn't catch her—Burns was inclined to take the latter view of it, seeing that the girl never was still, these days, long enough for anything to overtake her.

So it was that every day she swam and rode. Every day she strolled with Tige on the beach, picking up shells and throwing them with boyish skill onto the surface of the sea, which was unusually calm, where they skipped along, from ground swell to ground swell, or at a greedy eyed pelican that had soared too near. Every day she dug, with her own rapidly tanning fingers, in the soft soil of the well-spaded flower bed, until the last seed had been planted and the last handful of moist dirt patted down. Every day she ate more ravenously the plain, wholesome foods which Burns placed before her, and every day she became more like the tomboy girl who had gone barefoot about that very place in years long past.

When she ran back to the city for a day she felt stifled and crowded and, at the first opportunity, back she went to the house by the sea. Then one day the postman, who delivered the rural mail, left a letter for her in the gray tin box near the gate. Burns had brought it up to the porch, where Hazel sat lazily stemming strawberries, and Burns had almost fallen over a loose stone in the walk, so intense was she upon making out the unintelligible post-mark.

"It looks fureign, Miss Jean," she volunteered with an old servant's freedom. She had paused at the lower step and was still squinting with dim eyes at the post-mark and foreign stamp. "'Tain't from Moseer Dupont. 'Tain't got that kind of a stamp on it. Dear! dear! I do wisht I had my specs."

Hazel smiled with patient good humor.

"Perhaps I might be able to tell you where it is from if you would allow me to see it, Burns."

Unabashed, Burns extended the letter and, wiping her florid face on a corner of her apron, waited for the in-

formation. But Burns was doomed to disappointment. There was no information forthcoming.

The post-mark was Cairo. The chirography Jim Atherton's.

For a long minute Hazel held the letter unopened in her trembling hand. Then with utter unconsciousness of her surroundings she arose, spilling, as she did so, the basket of crimson berries, and made her way unsteadily down to the beach.

CHAPTER XXIX

M*A chère petite amie—*

“I may not call you more than that just now, but I am hoping that some day perhaps— But I must not get on forbidden ground. You might not read the rest of this letter if I get a wrong start.

“I have only just learned all the things which have happened to you and yours since you sailed for America. Mails are slow—and sometimes not at all—in the places where I have been. A letter written months ago by Winifred Blaine has just come to my camp. I think something has happened to change Winifred and I am wondering if, by any chance, that something could be you.

“She tells me of your illness, which followed your début as a singer, and from which you with difficulty recovered. She says that you are more beautiful than ever, if that is possible, and more unlike the manikins of society!

“She raves—actually raves about you, and says that any man who stays in the wilds of Africa when there is a goddess like you in America is a FOOL. I quite agree with her. One part of her letter I don’t understand. It appears to be a sort of confession—something about an injury which she did, or thinks she did, to the Billy Nortons. Poor Winifred! Why this metamorphosis?

“Another letter which came in the same post as Winifred’s is one from Allen Hamilton. Its post-mark is blurred and almost indistinct, but the abbreviation for California is legible. Since he gave me no address it is quite obvious that he expects no answer. This letter also was written months ago. It is brief and almost curt, yet there is an indefinable kindness and ‘good will to-

ward men' in it, and involuntarily I bared my head as I read it.

"He tells me very simply that his sentiments regarding your future have undergone a change. That he has decided not to share with the public his beloved little foster-sister. That she is free of career, and that his greatest wish is that she shall live as other women live. There follows what I suppose he meant to be the real purport of his letter, a request that I perform here a certain slight commission for him, but to me there is only one line in the letter. I have read and re-read that line innumerable times. 'She is free of career!' Free! Free! What a wonderful word that is!

"Apparently he prefers a harvest of love from a foster-sister to a harvest of dollars and fame. He is one of Nature's noblemen, is Allen Hamilton.

"Did you receive the cablegram which I sent you? My man rode four days to carry it to the nearest post, from where it could be sent on to a cable station and thence across the sea to you.

"Do you know exactly how many days have passed since that night, that last, never-to-be-forgotten night, in the park? I do. I can tell you the precise number of hours. I thought at first that Time would heal, that each succeeding day would make the pain less poignant. But, dear (may I not call you that?) the canker has eaten deeper with each of those dragging hours. I want you more to-day than I have ever wanted you and since the first time I saw you I have wanted you more than I have wanted anything else in the world or outside of it. Out here on the desert, where sky meets sand on all sides, where things assume different proportions than they possess back in the world of men, where the importance of gold and social position shrinks into nothing, where all a man's conceits are slaughtered—starved, I have learned to know myself. I have learned to know you and I have learned to know God. And, dear, this new understanding of the only things of real importance

in this life that is mine—God, you and myself—has kept hope alive in my breast where in all those hours, days and months it has been a companion to pain in the never-sleeping vigil. This new understanding of the scheme of things has made me sure that the Creator, who has counted every grain of sand in the endless sea of it which stretches away from my tent on all sides, cannot have made the mistake of creating a woman who answers every call of my heart and then making our paths divergent.

“Winifred writes that the night of your *début* the voice of an angel sang to the spellbound audience. That she herself, and even the Mummy, wept without shame. She enclosed some newspaper clippings which describe the wonders of your voice better than she could do it. The enthusiasm of the critics is so unusual that you must, indeed, be an unexcelled songbird. And to think that I, who love you better than all the world beside, have never heard you sing. But you will sing for me soon, won’t you?

“My man is packing. I will follow this letter at once. Perhaps the same ship which carries it to you will carry me to the same destination—you!

“Will you allow my belief in the infallibility of the Creator to be shattered?

“Until I look into your starry eyes again, I shall be your impatient
JIM.”

He was coming! Perhaps was already here!

Hazel held the letter tight to her breast and looked with happy, glowing eyes out to sea. Her pulses throbbed. Her body trembled. The One man was coming to her, the man who had kissed her that night in the shadow of a fountain which bore her name, the man who had touched his forehead to the sands of the desert on the night of her *début* and asked Allah to give to her success.

He would not find her at the house on the Drive in the

city unless she hastened there with all possible speed. Suddenly a startling plan struck her with terrific force. Her face became illuminated. Why not? What could tell him the things in her heart better than that?

With a low little laugh, which nearly approached a sob, she ran to the house, her swift, light feet scarcely touching the ground.

"Hello! Hello!" she cried into the transmitter of the telephone a moment later.

"Is that you, James? Yes. I wish to speak at once to Mrs. Rollins. Yes. Yes. I'll hold the wire." There followed a silence during which one of Hazel's feet patted the floor nervously.

"Yes, Hello! Is that Eleanor——?"

"Oh, Eleanor, I—I just received a letter from Jim Atherton. Yes. He is on his way to America. Perhaps is already here! He will come up there at once—and—and—— Oh, Eleanor, dear, can't you tell a little fib for me, just a tiny white lie, you know?"

"Bless you! I knew that I might rely upon you. Tell him that I've gone to see his farm, out of mere curiosity, that I've heard so much about it and about the story connected with it that I—I wanted to see it. Jim doesn't know that Allen had leased it from his agents, so he'll never dream that there is anything more to it than just what you tell him. He says that he has had a letter from Allen, also one from Winifred, both dated months back, and that the latter really was a very unWinifredlike letter. Has she—er—been converted to any new code of living?"

"——! ——!"

"Has a WHAT?"

"——!"

"A BABY! Winifred Blaine has a baby! Eleanor Rollins, are you 'miking a joke hat me,' as James says?"

"——!"

"Well, if it's really true, I must send her a note at once and order some flowers to be sent, too. Eleanor,

I'm glad for her. A—a baby would—*would* bring about a metamorphosis in the life of any woman.

"Yes, dear.—No, don't forget. Au revoir."

Hazel hung up the receiver and hurried away to find Burns.

Burns was trimming the surplus dough from a pie-tin. When Hazel told her the news she set the pan with its unbaked pie slowly down on a table, all the time staring blankly at the girl before her. Then of a sudden, as if the real significance of what the girl had told her had just burst upon her, she threw her fat old arms around Hazel and wept explosively.

"I always knowed it would come out like this. I always knowed it! An' you'll marry him, won't you, honey? Land sakes how I wisht your poor mama could be here now. But I reckon she knows all about it up there. Like as not she knew it before we did. I'm mighty glad, Jean, mighty glad! Marriage and love is just about everything in this life. Look what a lonely old fool I am. All because I was uppety with the man who wanted to marry me. He went away. But he weren't like your young man. *He* never came back. And I ain't never heard from him again."

Burns sniffled and Hazel patted her broad back soothingly. Burns was still reminiscing when Hazel remembered the man who was pleased to call her "little sister."

Gently putting the sniffing Burns from her, she ran to the nearest writing-desk and scribbled an almost illegible note to Allen Hamilton.

It said:

"Dear Big Chief:

"He is coming! You know who 'he' is, don't you? I think you have always known. That you knew from the beginning what the end would be. Fate is unavoidable, invincible! It brought him to me once, and—I ran away. But it is bringing him back to me again and this time—I shall not run away.

"I'd like to write you one of my usual silly letters, but somehow I don't feel a wee little bit silly just now. I feel sort of choky and I'd cry if I were encouraged to do so, or if there were any one here to pat my back as I just patted Burns' who, by the way, wanted to know if I thought she had a fish-bone in her throat.

"I'm much too excited to write. I wanted to get off a line, though, to tell you that I am going to fulfil your wish. That I am going to 'love, marry and live as other women live.' But oh, my dear big, Big Chief, being a—a—you know—to some one else won't make me less *your* loving, obedient, admiring, adoring (and lots of other things)

"SISTER JEAN.

"P. S.—I am going to annihilate Hazel Willis, the girl I was, and be forever the girl I am, Jean Delaine——!
(Do you know what the dash is for?) J."

She was folding the note when the telephone bell rang. Rising from her chair in a little panic, she rushed with flaming cheeks to the calling instrument. What if——!!

"Yes, yes, this is Hazel—— What? On his way here!—What?—When did he leave there?—Just a few minutes ago?—GOOD-BYE!"

There was no time for small talk or polite conversation! Hazel jabbed the receiver onto the hook.

HE was coming. He would be here as quickly as a fast automobile could bring him, and Hazel knew how Jim drove a car even when he was in no especial hurry. She flew up the stairs with a loud clatter of low boyish heels, shouting as she ran,

"He's on his way here, Burns! He's already on his way here!"

It was not a great while later that a long rakey car ran out of a cloud of dust and stopped at the gate in front of the old farmhouse.

Jim Atherton sprang out with impatient, eager feet, and, tossing his goggles, linen coat and gauntleted gloves

onto the seat beside the chauffeur, passed through the old-fashioned gate.

The picture which met his eyes did not startle him. It was just as if he had expected it. Not that he had thought of it or anticipated it. He had not. He had driven out here to find Hazel Willis, the woman who meant more to him than all the world beside, and some occult force had snatched away without warning all the years which lay between that other day when he had driven here to find a girl who had been bequeathed to him by an erratic old man and to-day when he had come to find the woman who had been bequeathed to him by God. He was once again the irresponsible young club-fellow, once again the man who had come to look over his new possessions.

Far down in his heart he knew that the picture before him was a mirage which would presently fade away. But he pretended to himself for a brief moment, there by the gate, that he believed it was real.

There was the faded old hammock stretched across a corner of the porch. There was the yellow, mongrel dog on the floor, his head reared in alarm, one ragged ear stiffened and straight. And—there sitting tense and defiant in the hammock—was—Jean Delaine! The girl who belonged to him! Her two long black braids hung down over her shoulders and ended in tiny, tight little curls in her lap. Her faded cotton dress came halfway below her knees and the limbs below it were bare and brown and the small feet were encased in boyish leather sandals.

Jim passed his hand across his eyes and leaned against the gate post. Burns, a bit late in picking up her cue, as she had rehearsed it with her young mistress, came flying out of the house, tying on a fresh apron as she ran.

"She's here. But she hain't dressed up none, but I reckon you'll overlook that."

Jim turned and stared at Burns stupidly. The picture might be a mirage. But sound was not a part of a pic-

ture. What sort of a prank were his senses playing upon him? Was that picture there on the porch real or wasn't it? Again he passed a tanned hand across his bronzed face. It was then that Tige ceased to obey his mistress's whispered admonition, her command for silence, and barked furiously.

With a single bound Jim Atherton was on the porch. With another he had reached the girl in the hammock.

She looked up at him in mock defiance for an instant, while Tige, the traitor, sniffed at him approvingly. Then with a little cry of "Jim! Jim!" she threw herself into his arms.

Jim ceased to wonder for one heavenly second—ceased to think. He knew only that his arms held the one thing which they wanted out of all the world—that they tingled and ached with joy—that his heart threatened to jump from his body and that he had gone suddenly mad—stark, staring mad!

During that heavenly second Burns had slipped considerably back into the house, Tige had barked a fierce welcome and the girl had wept happy tears against the front of the man's coat.

Then Jim caught her two arms a bit roughly and held her off at arms length. Under the tan his handsome face went white.

"Hazel! Jean! Tell me—for—God's sake—tell me, you are the same. You are the girl who belongs to me—and—the—woman who is—going—to—belong—to me. Tell me!"

His tense fingers hurt the girl's flesh, but she liked the hurt. She looked back into his clear blue eyes with ones that were wet and glistening.

"We are one, Jim. The girl who belongs to you and the—woman—who—is—going—to—belong—to—you."

The madness left the man's brain. In a flash he understood and there rushed upon him a wild desire to touch his forehead to the ground and thank Allah for this most precious gift. But instead a little prayer to

the Christian God, their God, went up from his heart.

"Jean! My little Jean!" He was kissing the dark, glowing eyes, the fragrant long braids, the warm sun-tanned cheek—then, as he had done in that little French park so many weary months ago, he kissed the sweet red lips.

The girl closed her eyes and gave herself up to being "just a woman" and far down within her was a little cry of "Please, God, let me be *just a woman* now and forever more."

"And the career, darling?" Atherton smiled down into the lovely face and all the pent-up, suppressed love and tenderness of years were in his own bronzed one.

"Will be just loving you, dear."

Jim caught her tight to his breast again.

"Oh, Jean, Jean, dear little will-o'-the-wisp. You've wasted so many of our years!"

"No, Jim. What has gone was best. The years away from here have taught me many things, dear. And they gave to me the friendship of one of God's noblemen."

Atherton bowed his head.

"Yes. He is a wonderful man. A great man!" He hesitated, then he continued, his voice infinitely sad.

"You—you wanted so much—that—he should have a harvest for his sowing. Are you quite sure that we are not robbing him?"

The girl moved about in his arms and looked out over the emerald sea.

"He will have his harvest, Jim." A warm color spread over her face as she recalled Allen Hamilton's wish that some day she should fulfil woman's noblest mission. "Some day I shall tell you about it," she said, softly.

For an interval they were silent, then Jim, who could not be expected to be sad for long with so glorious a being in his hungry arms, glanced down the slender figure to the sandaled feet and laughed a gay, happy laugh.

"You are just as you were that day when you fired

volley after volley of stinging shots into my friends and me. I do believe the sandals are the same."

Again her face flushed a warm pink and her long dark lashes drooped to her cheeks.

"Burns *said* it was perfectly indecent for me to bare my limbs and wear sandals just because I wanted to look as I did on that other day when you came, but"—she paused, tossed her head defiantly, for all the world like the Jean of long ago, and went on—"but I can't see why it is any more indecent for the man I am going to marry to see a few inches of my bare limbs than it was for several staring people to see that same number of inches of an almost-grown-up girl's legs." She emphasized the last word, at which Jim threw back his head and laughed in keenest enjoyment.

"Oh, you darling little madcap! There was never any one like you!" Then immediately he became serious. He took her lovely flushed face between his two hands and looked deep into the sweet dark eyes.

"You won't ever run away from me again, Jean? It has been such a wretched time without you. You ran away from me twice. But I swear that if you try it again I'll—I'll"—he lifted one of the heavy braids—"drag you back to my lair by the hair of your head just as men of the stone age dragged their women into their caves. You're my woman, Jean, and I can't live without you. I want you to be my wife, soon, at once, to-day, *now!*" His face was close to hers. His eyes were pleading, nay, commanding.

The girl slipped out from under his hands and turned to meet the bleary, bloodshot eyes of the dog who stood waiting patiently for the time when they would remember him. She stooped and pressed a tear-stained face to the yellow scraggly hair.

"What do you think about it, Tige?"

Jim's eyes were moist and something in his throat was threatening to choke him, but he shook a menacing finger at the dog.

Tige blinked a bleary eye at him and then *barked* boisterously.

"Very well, Tige. We'll be his wife just as soon as he wants us to be."

"Jean!" She was in his arms again and all the world was forgotten.

Inside the house Burns was wondering if people in love did not eat, and if it were useless to keep the luncheon longer in the warming oven.

Outside the gate a very tired, very warm chauffeur was wondering just how long a man with money could expect a man without any to sit waiting in a dusty car under a merciless sun.

THE END

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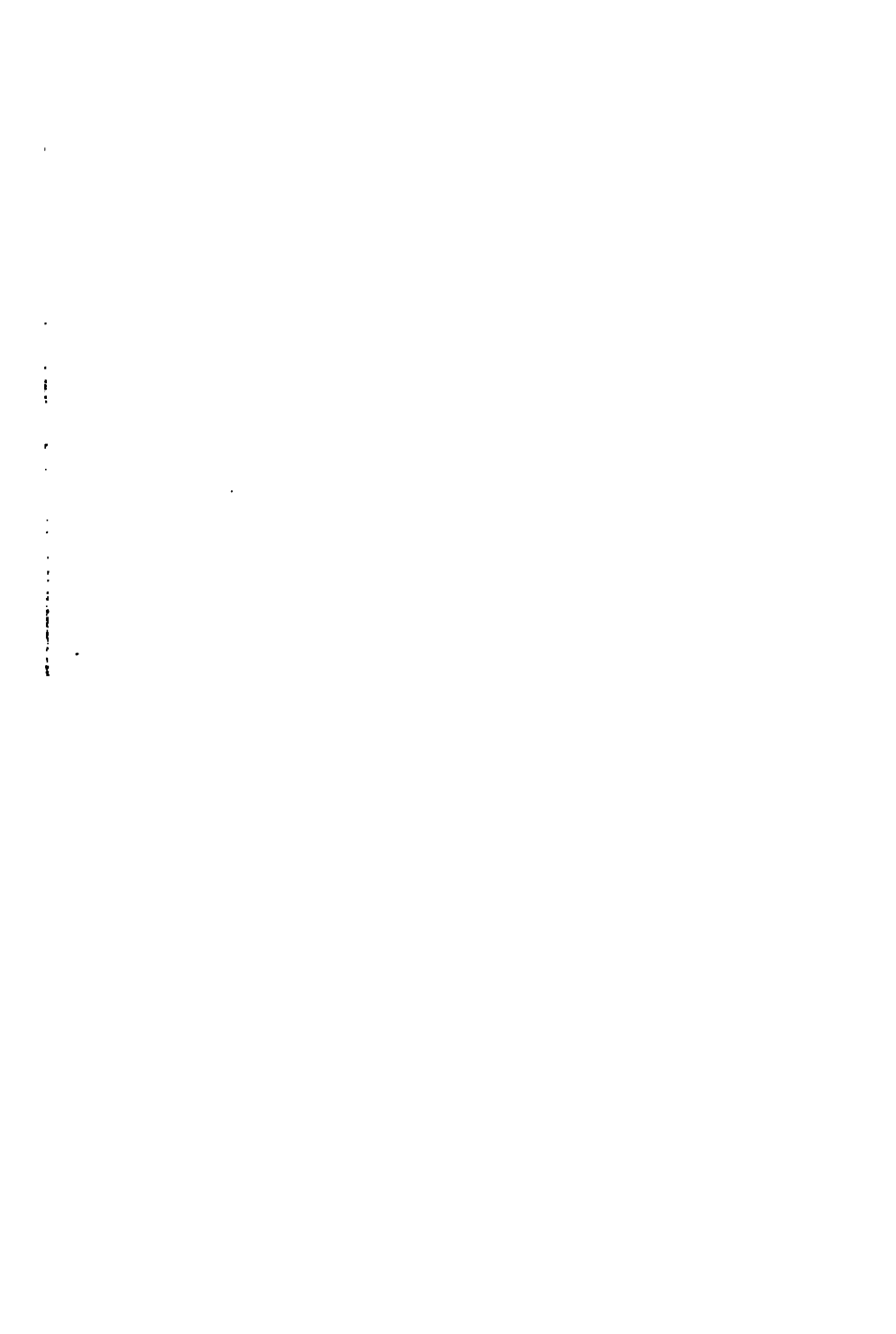
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